

# **THE SPANISH REVOLUTION 1931 – 37**

**by Ted Grant and Peter Taaffe**

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**The Spanish Revolution  
1931 – 37**

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**Cover photo: Anarchist militamen and women off to the front.  
Barcelona, July 1936.**

711: Moslem invasion of Spain. Cultural ascendancy of Spain. Final expulsion of Moors—1492—followed by suppression of municipalities, expulsion of Jews and setting up of Inquisition. Discovery of America. Rise of Imperial Spain. Opening of American colonies. Rise of Dutch and English rivals. 1714: Merchant Republic of Catalonia loses independence.

### **19th Century**

1808: Napoleonic invasion. Rise of national consciousness and of ideas of 18th century enlightenment. Liberal constitution of 1812 launched a republican movement with highpoints—1820, 1854, 1868, 1873, and ushering in a period of great instability—the military juntas, pronunciamientos and pronounced regionalism. Loss of the mainland Spanish American colonies. Growth of industry and proletariat. Ingress of anarchist ideas. 1875: Bourbon restoration. Movements of revolt in Caribbean colonies. Spanish American War—1898. Loss of last colonies. Rise of socialist movement.

### **20th Century**

1909: Great working class strike. Martyrdom of Francisco Ferrer. 1914-19: World War I. Neutral Spain enjoys rapid development of industry due to demands for iron, munitions, etc. 1916: General Strike. 1917: General Strike. 1917-19: Catalan movement for autonomy.

#### **1921**

**July 21** Moroccans defeat Spaniards at Anual, killing 12,000. Communist Party founded.

#### **1923**

**September 12** Mutiny of Barcelona garrison.

**September 23** Coup d'état of Gen. Primo de Rivera, backed by industrial bourgeoisie, imposes military dictatorship.

#### **1925**

**July** Franco-Spanish Agreement to fight the Riffs.

**December** End of formal dictatorship. de Rivera Prime minister.

**November** Catalan putsch fails. Economic crisis hits Spain.

#### **1929**

**January** Military Revolt at Ciudad Real.

**March** Universities closed to suppress student opposition.

#### **1930**

**January** Dictator Primo de Rivera resigns; King Alfonso XIII appoints Berenguer to head interim government.

**December** Liberal officers stage unsuccessful (Jaca) coup.

## **1931**

**February** Berenguer resigns.

**April 12-14** Republicans carry all large towns in municipal elections; Alfonso goes into exile; republic declared; Alcala Zamora is prime minister; Azana is war minister; Maura is minister of interior; Caballero is minister of labour.

**April 15** Government calls constituent Cortes (assembly).

**May** Clashes between monarchists and workers in Madrid; several churches are burned.

**June** Elections to Cortes give overwhelming majority to pro-republican parties; Socialists largest party in Cortes; Catholic Church is disestablished; Alcala Zamora and Maura, both Catholics, resign; Alcala Zamora becomes president of republic; Azana is prime minister.

**July-August** Strike wave; general strike in Seville crushed by republican government artillery.

## **1932**

**January** Uprisings in Catalonia organised by the FAI.

**August** Unsuccessful coup by monarchist general Sanjurjo.

## **1933**

**January 30** Hindenburg appoints Hitler chancellor.

**April** Municipal elections show big gains for rightists.

**September** Azana resigns as prime minister; Lerroux forms government pending elections.

**October 29** Falange Espanola founded in Madrid.

**November** Elections to Cortes give rightists and monarchists control when CNT abstains; Lerroux confirmed as prime minister; begins to repeal reforms.

## **1934**

**June** Rural strike movement called by Anarchists; Marcia dies; Companys takes over Catalan Generalitat (local government).

**October** Lerroux forms new government, with members of right-wing CEDA of Gil Robles; General strike of Socialists and Anarchists crushed; Lerroux calls in Franco to crush uprising of Asturian miners.

**October-November** Fall of Oviedo, end of Asturian commune; 5,000 killed in savage reprisals; 30,000 arrested as political prisoners.

## **1935**

**August** Seventh Congress of Comintern proclaims Popular Front policy.

**September 25** Founding of POUM

## **1936**

**January** Lerroux resigns amid financial scandal; Cortes dissolved.

**February 16** New elections bring Popular Front to power; Azana is prime minister again; Anarchists and POUM support Popular Front in the election.

**March** Peasants in Estremadura seize land.

**April** General Mola issues circular calling for insurrection; Socialist and Communist youth groups merge; Hitler remilitarises Rhineland.

**May 10** Azana replaces Alcala Zamora as president; Casares Quiroga is prime minister.

**May-June** Mass strikes in France; French Popular Front elected; Leon Blum is prime minister; Daladier is minister of war.

**July 13** Spanish CP declares full support to government.

**July 17-21** Fascist rising begins in Morocco and spreads to Spain; Quiroga refuses arms to workers, and is replaced by Martinez Barrio; General Miaja is minister of war; Companys in Catalonia refuses to distribute arms; Giral replaces Martinez Barrio; arms are distributed to workers.

**August 15** France and England sign nonintervention pact.

**August 21** Zinoviev and Kamenev executed in USSR in first big Moscow show trial.

**September 4** Giral resigns; Largo Caballero becomes prime minister on condition that CP join government; Uribe (CP) is minister of agriculture; six Socialists in cabinet include Prieto (minister of navy and air) and Negrin (minister of finance).

**September 26** CNT and POUM join Generalitat in Catalonia; Nin becomes minister of justice.

**October 10** Central government ends independence of militias.

**October 29** Siege of Madrid begins.

**November** Central government reorganised to include Anarchists (Garcia Oliver, minister of justice); Caballero moves government to Valencia. International Brigades arrive in Madrid.

**December 16** POUM expelled from government.

**December 21** Letter from Stalin to Caballero insists on protection of private property.

**December 25** German-Japanese Anti-Comintern Pact signed.

## **1937**

**April 25** Bombing of Guernica.

**May** Government attempt to seize Barcelona telephone exchange from Anarchists leads to new upsurge; Negrin replaces Caballero as prime minister.

**June 15-16** POUM outlawed by central government; leaders arrested.

**October** Central government moved to Barcelona.

**November 6** Italy signs Anti-Comintern Pact.

## **1938**

**January 11** Heavy bombardment of Barcelona begins.

**April-June** Franco reaches coast and cuts republican Spain in half.

**September** International Brigade fights final battles in Ebro campaign; Chamberlain and Daladier sign Munich Pact with Hitler.

**November** International Brigades withdraw from Spain.

## **1939**

**January 26** Barcelona surrenders.

**February 27** France and Britain recognize Franco while loyalists still hold a third of Spain.

**March 4** Republican general Miaja broadcasts manifesto proposing surrender.

**March 5-6** Hitler occupies Czechoslovakia.

**March 28** Madrid and Valencia surrender; Spain signs Anti-Comintern Pact.

**March 29** Active hostilities cease.

**April 1** United States recognises Franco.

**August 22** Stalin-Hitler Pact signed.

A black and white map of the Iberian Peninsula, showing the regions of Spain and Portugal. The map is titled "BAY OF BISCAY" at the top. The Atlantic Ocean is to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea is to the east. The Strait of Gibraltar is at the bottom. The regions of Spain are outlined with dashed lines and labeled: GALICIA, ASTURIAS, LEON, CASTILE (divided into OLD and NEW), ARAGON, CATALONIA, VALENCIA, MURCIA, ANDALUSIA, and ESTRE-GUADIANA. Major cities are marked with dots and labeled: MADRID, SEVILLE, BARCELONA, VALENCIA, and LISBON. The Balearic Islands (MAJORCA, MINORCA, IBIZA, FORMENTERA) are shown to the east. The map also shows the borders with FRANCE to the north and SPANISH MOROCCO to the south.

## **PREFACE**

Events of the last eight years have served to further confirm the analysis of this pamphlet which was originally published in 1977. The 'Communist' Party has paid the full price for its reformist programme, being riven by splits and reduced from 15% to only 4% of the vote in the 1982 elections. The PSOE (Socialist Party) leaders have degenerated beyond the pre-war 'popular frontists'. Elected to government in 1982 with a promise to create 800,000 new jobs, they are now unloading the full weight of the crisis onto the backs of the working class, presiding over 15% unemployment, and now introducing in the face of massive opposition from the workers, a plan to 'restructure' heavy industry with the loss of 200,000 jobs.

All the lessons of the 1930s retain their full force today, especially the impossibility, whether by the Popular Front of the 1930s or a Socialist majority government today, of solving the fundamental problems in Spain—unemployment, near starvation among landless labourers, the National Question etc.,—except on the basis of the immediate socialist transformation in Spain and internationally.

**May 1985**



# INTRODUCTION

by Peter Taaffe

*The Spanish Revolution 1931-37* by Ted Grant was first published as a lengthy article in the *Militant International Review*, No.7 (Autumn 1973). We are republishing it now as a separate pamphlet for a number of reasons. Firstly, July is the 41st anniversary of Franco's fascist uprising and the revolutionary answer it received from the immortal Spanish working class. Secondly, the Spanish working class stands on the eve of the revolutionary storms which will put in the shade even the magnificent movement of their grandfathers and fathers between 1931-37. At the same time the leaders of the Spanish Communist Party—and their apologists in Britain—are attempting to cover up their disastrous role in 1936. Their policies of Popular Frontism paved the way for Franco's victory and 40 years of fascist slavery for the Spanish working class. Moreover, these leaders, together with the leaders of the PSOE, the Socialist Party, are putting forward a new and worse version of the Popular Front, which if followed, will result in a catastrophe for the Spanish workers in the future.

Therefore, this study is particularly relevant for the new generation of Spanish workers, who because of illegal conditions, have not had ready access to material which accurately recorded the perfidious role of the CP leaders during the Spanish revolution. Even now, with the loosening of the grip of the dictatorship and the legalisation of the Socialist and Communist Parties, this material is not being made available. On the contrary a monstrous re-writing of history—casting the Spanish CP leaders as palladins of the revolution—is underway. Outstanding amongst these are two recent works, a book by Santiago Carrillo, the present leader of the Spanish CP, which takes the form of a lengthy interview between himself, Regis Debray and Max Gallo and is called *Dialogue on Spain*. The other is an article by Monty Johnstone of the British CP, in the *Young Communist Journal*

*Cogito*, in which a section is devoted to refuting Trotsky's writings on Spain between 1931-39.

All the arguments which Monty Johnstone deploys against Trotsky are answered in advance, in this article by Ted Grant. We would advise the reader to go over Johnstone's article and then read this pamphlet. Johnstone seeks to justify the 'progressive' role of the Popular Front in the Spanish revolution as a means of 'winning the middle class' He asserts that the bloc between the bourgeois republicans in Spain and the workers' parties was merely an extension of the 'united front' between the workers' parties themselves. He even drags in by the hair a quote from Lenin to justify this position . . . "to renounce in advance . . . any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are only temporary, unstable, or vacillating or conditional allies) is this not ridiculous in the extreme." He couples this with a denunciation of Trotsky for his statement that the Popular Front was "lulling the workers and peasants with Parliamentary illusions . . . (and) . . . paralysing their will to struggle." After all this bloc with the republican 'allies' was justified by the fact that "In February the Popular Front . . . had beaten the right and centre parties" asserts Monty. Ted Grant shows that the masse—highly suspicious of the bourgeois republicans—voted for the Popular Front, not because of the inclusion of the republicans in the Front, but despite this. This was shown by the fact that the masses refused to wait for the government to legislate but acted within hours to put their demands into practice. They tore open the jails and released the workers who had been imprisoned after the crushing of the Asturian Commune in October 1934. The Popular Front government got round to legislating their release in September 1936, two months after Franco's revolt!

Moreover the above remarks of Trotsky were made not before February 1936, but in July of that year on the eve of the fascist uprising. What was the Republican government doing if not lulling the workers to sleep? Not only did they refuse to arm the workers, but threatened to shoot anyone who attempted to do so! While the fascist generals plotted their revolt the Popular Front government condemned as slanderers anyone who dared suggest that this was what was actually taking place. Thus the Republican Premier, Casares Quiroga on the 14th July—just three days before the fascist revolt—when challenged that Mola, chief conspirator with Franco, was planning an uprising declared: "Mola is a general loyal to the Republic"! Martinez Barrio, who replaced Quiroga on the 19th July, on assuming office phoned Mola, then in the thick of the fascist uprising and the murderer of thousands of workers, and offered him and Franco the

Ministry of the Interior and Defence; the two positions which Hitler received and enabled him to consolidate power 'peacefully'.

Thus if these "allies of the workers" had succeeded Franco would have taken power three years earlier than he actually did! The conspiracy failed because the fascist generals politely refused the offer—not believing that the Republicans would be able to sell it to the working class. Mola regretfully told Barrio: "If you and I should reach agreement, both of us will have betrayed our ideals and our men." In reality the bourgeois republicans were entirely loyal to their ideals—the defence of private property. They were prepared to deliver the workers, bound hand and foot into the arms of Franco and Mola. Are these the actions of 'allies'—even the unstable and vacillating variety—Monty? If the bourgeois republicans in Spain were not outright enemies of the Spanish working class and of the social revolution then what will enemies look like?

Moreover, Lenin never at any time justified a programmatic bloc with the leaders of middle class parties as a means of winning the little men of town and country to the side of the working class. On the contrary, the history of Bolshevism is a history of a war against such notions, not just in Russia either, as Monty Johnstone suggests. When Millerand, the French Socialist Party leader, formed a bloc with the leaders of the Radical Socialist Party at the turn of the century, he was condemned by Lenin. The Radical Socialist Party was characterised by Lenin as "the most vicious and consummate representatives of finance capital, the political exploiter of the peasants and middle class". The way to win the middle class, said Lenin, was not in a coalition with these "political exploiters" but by unmasking them before their followers and demonstrating in action, that only the working class was capable of solving their problems. In Russia in 1917 this policy—implacably opposed to the Menshevik and Social Revolutionary versions of the Popular Front—succeeded in winning the peasantry to the side of the working class. In Spain in 1936 the 'strike breaking conspiracy' of the Popular Front succeeded only in pushing the peasantry and the middle class into indifference and opposition.

Lenin was sometimes prepared to co-operate with the liberals on practical or technical matters such as the transportation of revolutionary literature, joint action against the fascist Black Hundreds etc. He was prepared under certain conditions to have common voting lists on the second ballot with the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries. But at no time did the Bolsheviks form a programmatic bloc, have common organisations or subordinate themselves to the Russian 'republicans'.

## “VICTORY FIRST THEN REVOLUTION”

Monty Johnstone's article is also outstanding in another respect; in its blatant distortions of Trotsky's writing and also by its crude attempt to re-write Spanish history. Monty prides himself on having broken with Stalinist methods of falsification. Yet his treatment of Trotsky's writings on Spain betray the same use of selective and distorted quotations in order to convey the opposite of what Trotsky was actually saying. Thus in relation to the May events in Barcelona (fully explained by Ted Grant) he has Trotsky seemingly condemning the workers. He writes: "Trotsky characterised it as 'a more or less spontaneous movement' and noted correctly that such uprisings were 'all to the advantage of the fascists'." In fact Trotsky was saying something entirely different, as the full statement will show. "I have repeated again and again that the absolutely false policy of the Comintern in Spain cannot but cause discontent among the masses and spontaneous uprisings, all to the advantage of the fascists." Thus Trotsky considers that the false policies of the Stalinists in Spain were objectively aiding the fascists by leading to discontent amongst the masses. This in turn led to uprisings by the masses, to defend the gains of the revolution from the encroachment of the counter revolution. Nowhere did Trotsky condemn the attempts of the heroic Barcelona proletariat for their attempt to prevent the march of the counter revolution within Republican Spain.

More serious, if that is possible, is the attempt of Johnstone to cover up the role played by the Spanish CP in the revolution and Civil War. Johnstone writes: "It was therefore a complete distortion for Trotsky repeatedly to allege that the 'Comintern declared with regard to Spain that the social reforms will come after victory'." tiago Carrillo—upon whom Johnstone leans for support—is more explicit: "All that discussion started by the Trotskyists, about 'winning the war or carrying out the revolution', was an absurd discussion which had no relation to reality, for in Spain the response to the fascist uprising had been the taking over of the factories and other enterprises and large estates, agrarian reform, the distribution of land to the peasants. . . . In those days the revolution was being carried out at the same time as the war was being waged." (page 18, *Dialogue on Spain*).

Was the slogan 'Victory first then revolution' a mere invention of Trotskyism? On the contrary the press of the Spanish CP and their counterparts internationally were daily grinding out articles on this theme. In the first days after the workers' uprising it is true that CP writers, under the influence of the mighty movement of the

Spanish working class, correctly recorded the tendency which the revolution was taking: "Things are moving towards a Spanish Soviet Republic through the triumph of the Red militia." (*Daily Worker*, 22nd August 1936). But on the 3rd August *L'Humanité*, at the request of the Spanish Communist Party declared that "The Spanish people are not fighting for the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat and that it knows only one aim: the defence of the republican law and order through respect for property."

The General Secretary of the Spanish CP, Jose Diaz also stated: "We wish to fight only for a democratic republic with a broad social content. There can be no question at present of a dictatorship of the proletariat or of socialism, but only of the struggle of democracy against fascism." Carrillo himself (at this time leader of the United Socialist Youth), said: "We are not fighting for a social revolution. Our organisation is neither socialist nor communist. The JSU is not a Marxist youth group." (in Valencia, in January 1937).

On October 1st, 1936 Diaz declared: "We of the Communist Party consider that we together with the honest ranks of the working class will have to go a long road with the Spanish democrats. Some try to portray this government as a communistic government or generally give it a name of some peculiar socialist viewpoint. In answer we say with complete decisiveness that this government is a continuation of the previous government" (from *Communism and the Spanish Civil War* by Cattell).

Diaz also stated: "It is necessary to mobilise everyone to unite everyone in order to win the war. Libertarian communism, dictatorship of the proletariat, socialism of the state, a federal republic; WE WILL SPEAK OF ALL THESE AFTER THE WAR" (Our emphasis).

Monty Johnstone having condemned as vile slanderers those who like Trotsky, suggested that this was the position of the Spanish CP then goes on to argue for precisely this position: "However, the task of carrying through a complete socialist revolution was to be left until after the Civil War had been won. If the Spanish people were to have any future under any form of democracy, whether it was bourgeois or proletarian, so some new transitional form of 'people's democracy', the first condition was the defeat of the fascists who were supported by the bulk of the Spanish army corps as well as by Germany and Italy."

But why did the socialist revolution in Spain have to be postponed? After all Carrillo in his book admits "As soon as the war began in Spain a revolution began at once. . . the response to the fascist uprising had been the taking over of the factories and other enter-

prises and large estates, agrarian reform and the creation of a new state . . . where were the big capitalists, the great landed proprietors, the bourgeois state apparatus. They had disappeared.”(Our emphasis).

### **“WE DIDN’T TALK OF SOCIALIST REVOLUTION”**

The landlords and the capitalists had fled almost to a man to the side of Franco; the factories and the big estates at least in Catalonia, Aragon and the Levante had been taken over; the capitalist state—the army and police, had been smashed and the workers had improvised their own police and army etc., i.e. the embryo of a ‘new state’ a workers state. Why then did the Spanish CP not only not take the initiative in completing the revolution and in organising such a state, but in actually doing everything to prevent the Spanish working class from moving in this direction? Our sage Monty argues that this was in order: “to achieve the widest possible unity for the defeat of Franco, whilst at the same time defending and extending the social gains won in the democratic, anti-feudal, anti-monopoly capitalist revolution.” But Carrillo pulls the carpet from under Monty in the following extract from his book:

*“Question:* Wasn’t it a case of an implicit demand by the Soviet Union, which was seeking alliance with the western bourgeois parties, that a bourgeois democratic Spain should be seen to exist, and not a socialist one, which might have frightened France and Britain and might have prevented the communist movement from fitting into a broad anti-fascist front? Or, if you prefer it, wasn’t the Soviet Union being objectively constrained to hold back the revolutionary elan of Spain?

*“Carrillo:* It is obvious that during that period the Soviet Union was interested in an alliance with the parliamentary powers against fascism. In my opinion that policy was correct. And this did have an influence on the Spanish movement. What revolutionary movement is there which isn’t influenced by the international context? But objectively speaking, even if that had not been the case, in the specific historical conditions, national and international, the Spanish revolution, with its socialist prospects, was not possible save as a popular and anti-fascist revolution, save as a national revolutionary war, refraining from copying the forms of other revolutions, but having its own specific ones. I understand how, in 1936, certain revolutionaries didn’t grasp that. But today, after all the revolutionary experiences, of such varied kinds, which have taken place since the Second World War, to go on obstinately maintaining that the Spanish

revolution should have copied the October revolution of 1917 is really inconceivable.

“Going deeper into the subject, I would say this: a socialist revolution is a very long and very complex process—that is shown by the experience of all the socialist countries. And I believe that one of the faults of revolutionaries has been to baptise as socialist a regime that is not yet socialist, even though it is moving in that direction, and that has given a bad impression of socialism. To sum up on this, it is clear that at the time the European bourgeoisie would not have tolerated a situation in which a small isolated country like Spain could victoriously carry through a socialist revolution. The proof of this is that in spite of all our precautions, we were in the end defeated by the European and international bourgeoisie.” (Page 160-161, *Our emphasis*).

Yet earlier on Carrillo is involved in the following exchange:

“*Question:* What aims did it set itself: ‘To defeat fascism’, or ‘To defend parliamentary democracy’, or ‘To carry out the socialist revolution?’

“*Carrillo:* In that period we didn’t talk about socialist revolution, and we even criticised those who did. But we were in the process of carrying it out, for when the enterprises and the banks are in the hands of the industrial and white-collar workers, when the judicial apparatus and the army are the creation of the Popular Front, when the land is in the hands of the peasants, when you have got rid of speculators and when there is no longer a propertied class which holds the dominant position, then if that isn’t a beginning of socialism, what else is it? If we didn’t talk about it, this was primarily because of the international context. We wanted to neutralise the bourgeois forces in the European democracies. But this way of presenting events was also due to the social forms assumed by the Spanish revolutionary process. Your question, in the way in which it is formulated, reflects, unwittingly perhaps, the idea that there is only one road, only one form, already classical, for socialist revolution. This was, and still is, the error of those who take up Trotskyist and leftist positions and of their criticisms regarding the revolutionary war of 1936-39. They did not, and still do not take into account what was specific, particular in our revolution, nor do they bear in mind the period in which it was developing, that is to say, the period of the struggle against fascism.” (Page 160, *our emphasis*).

“We didn’t talk about socialist revolution, and we even criticised those who did.” “We” not only “criticised” those who talked about “socialist revolution” but arrested, tortured in special secret GPU prisons and murdered those—like Andres Nin and Andrade—who

reflected, however vaguely, the urge of the masses to complete the revolution. Not even a child of ten would accept Carrillo's explanation that while they, the Stalinists, "were in the process" of carrying out the socialist revolution, they never admitted it, in order to conceal the fact from the European ruling class—all this in an attempt to 'neutralise' it! We are asked to believe that the hard headed British and French ruling classes, were gullible enough to believe that a socialist revolution was not taking place because the Stalinists refused to speak about it! The real policy of the Spanish CP is indicated by Carrillo when he admits . . . "It is clear that at the time the European bourgeoisie would not have tolerated a situation in which a small isolated country like Spain could victoriously carry through a socialist revolution." Because neither international capital nor Stalin—for the reasons explained by Ted Grant—were prepared to ordain the socialist revolution, then the Spanish CP bent all their efforts in derailing and sabotaging it. Despite the convoluted language, evasiveness and internal contradictions in Carrillo's statement it is a clear vindication of the analysis of the role of the Stalinists in the Spanish revolution made by both Leon Trotsky in his writings and Ted Grant in this pamphlet.

If, as Carrillo argues, the Spanish CP were in the "process" of carrying out the socialist revolution (albeit secretly), that the Left Republican President Azana "did not possess real power" which was "in the hands of the people and the working class forces played the decisive role" why then did the CP not brush the powerless republicans aside and attempt to organise a workers and peasants state? Monty Johnstone answers: "this popular revolution from July 1936 contained within it important elements of a socialist revolution, though not a soviet one." Thus Johnstone tortuously attempts to draw a distinction between a socialist and 'soviet' revolution! In the Russian revolution the soviets were merely the means used by the working class—under the leadership of the Bolsheviks—to take power, and became thereafter organs of administration of the workers state. If they did not develop in Spain, a principle cause of that was the fact that the Spanish CP fought against the creation of soviets. Franz Borkenau, an Austrian ex-Communist Party member, records the opinions of the CP in a discussion with the representative of the PSUC (the Catalanian section of the CP) on the 6th August 1936: "How is it", I asked, "there are no Soviets proper formed out of deputies elected directly by the workers in their factories." It is because everything turns upon the military problems' is the answer, which does not sound very convincing to me" (*Spanish Cockpit*, page 81). Dozens of similar accounts could be given to illustrate the



counter revolutionary role played by the Stalinists.

## LAND QUESTION

Monty Johnstone is indignant at the merest suggestion that the Spanish CP assumed this role. He has scoured the history books to prove that the Popular Front government—with the Spanish CP leaders in the lead—played a revolutionary role:

“Of special importance was the decree passed in October 1936 on the initiative of the Communist Minister of Agriculture, which effectively expropriated the big landowners. As Professor Hugh Thomas has written in his well-known history of the Spanish Civil War, this measure ‘legalising the expropriation of land owned by nationalists revolutionised the life of Spain . . . In almost every case the peasants of republican Spain were by early 1937 either owners of their own land or labouring for a collective farm. The tenant farmers and the landless labourers dependent upon a negligent landlord had ‘vanished.’ And Dolores Ibarruri was to emphasise: ‘The peasants all over Spain—note, all over Spain, and not only in the part that now happens to be in our hands—will have the land which was turned over to them by the decree of the Ministry of Agriculture of October 7, 1937.’ Yet Trotsky alleged—from what special intelligence he does not make clear—that the Spanish peasants . . . say: ‘With Franco and with Cabellero, it is the same thing,’ and added with touching solicitude: ‘I am with this primitive Spanish peasant’.”

In a footnote on the same page as this Monty Johnstone also makes one of only two points directed against this article by Ted Grant: “*The Case of Leon Trotsky* (London 1937), p.294. Ted Grant, in the article quoted above, quotes at length from a Communist article of August 1936 on the inadequacies of the land reform up till then and studiously avoids making even a passing reference to the decree of October. Grant quotes from Hugh Thomas’ book in another connection and therefore cannot be unaware that the October decree transformed the previous situation. Yet he bases his argument on the assumption of Socialist and Communist refusal to give the land to more than two-and-a-half per cent of the peasants! (*op. cit.*, pp27-28,39,43,47-48) And Felix Morrow in his *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain*, recommended by Grant as a ‘Marxist classic’, writes; ‘The land decree of October 7,1936, merely sanctioned division of estates belonging to known fascists; other wealthy landlords, peasant exploiters, etc., remained untouched. The aroused hopes of the peasantry were smothered.’ (New Park, London, edi-

tion 1963 p51) By concentrating on the form of the decree, Morrow seeks to play down its actual effect. It declared that the lands of those 'who directly or indirectly had taken part in the rebellion against the republic were liable to confiscation. In practice this meant almost all landowners' estates.' (I. Maisky, *Spanish Notebooks*, London 1966, p117; Sandoval & Azcarate, *op cit.*, pp88-89.)"

## STALINIST COUNTER REVOLUTION

First of all if Monty had read the article carefully he would have realised that the "six months" which Ted Grant refers to is the period between February and July 1936 when only two and a half per cent of the land was given to the peasants. After Franco's coup Ted Grant records the fact that the peasants of Catalonia and Aragon took over and collectivised the large estates—which accounted for more than two and a half per cent of the land!

Undoubtedly the peasants went much further than the reformist land decree of October 1936. Trotsky and his followers fully understood and recorded the fact. Felix Morrow who Johnstone criticises on this score without obviously having fully read him writes in his "masterpiece" *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain*: "In Agriculture the road to be followed has been mapped by the very first decree, October 7th, 1936, which had merely confiscated estates of fascists leaving untouched the system of private property in land including the right to own large properties and to exploit wage labour. Despite the decree however, collectivised agriculture became widespread during the first months of the revolution." (page 113). But in extolling the virtues of mass peasant action which went beyond the letter of the law Monty Johnstone 'forgets' one small 'detail'—this same law was used later on by the counter revolution to take back the land from the peasants who had 'illegally' occupied it. We see the same process in the Portuguese revolution today where the peasants in the Southern Alentejo went much further than the law in seizing the land. In the first stages of the revolution reaction was incapable of acting against the peasants. But now with the purging of the army of radical elements, the reconstruction of a reliable police force etc. the counter revolution—hiding behind the Soares Socialist Party leaders—are attempting to take back 'illegally' held land as a prelude to action against the mass of the peasants in the South later. In Portugal the Communist Party is compelled to oppose the counter revolution because of its base in the Alentejo and also because the triumph of reaction—as the example of Chile

shows—would lead to their murder and destruction of their party.

In republican Spain the vanguard of the counter revolution was the Communist Party. The Stalinist, Uribe, Minister of Agriculture in Caballero's and Negrin's governments, used the re-constructed capitalist state against the collectives in Aragon, Catalonia and the Levante. Aragon where three quarters of the land was collectivised, was invaded by an army led by the Stalinist General Lister. The collective farms were broken up and handed back to their owners, to the former caciques and rich peasants.

The Stalinists at the time and their apologists today like Monty Johnstone attempt to justify these actions by inventing fairy tales about mass 'coercion' of peasants to join the collectives. This is given the lie by the fact that the two big peasant organisations, the Socialist UGT and Anarchist CNT both supported voluntary collectivisation. Moreover the UGT organisation of the Levante Province denounced Uribe as "Public enemy Number One!" It is sheer hypocrisy to suggest that those who had uncritically accepted Stalin's forced collectivisations in Russia, with its persecutions, mass deportations and deaths—"the collectivisation of the felt shoes on the feet of little children"—were in any way concerned about the interests of Spain's peasant poor. On the contrary they were concerned to stamp out the gains of the revolution in the countryside, represented by the occupation of the land and collectivisation.

There were of course many blemishes in the collectivised farms as also with the operation of the factory committees and workers control in the workplaces. Such defects are inevitable if occupied enterprises act in isolation without a worked out plan of production linking industry to agriculture etc. But these would undoubtedly have been overcome on the basis of a workers' state. The Stalinists attempted to correct these defects, not by establishing a workers' state, but by wiping out the gains of the revolution in industry and agriculture. How they went about this is spelt out in detail in Felix Morrow's book, to which the reader is referred for further information.

In his comments about the May events in Barcelona Johnstone waxes indignant about Trotsky's "support (for) civil war behind the Republican lines, when there was already a civil war going on against the fascists, who objectively occupied a considerable part of the country". He produces as evidence to prove that the POUM and the anarchist youth of the "Friends of Durruti" were dupes of the fascists the memoirs of Faupel the German ambassador. The latter remarks that Franco's brother had told him that the fascists had started the fighting in Barcelona with . . . 13 agents! No serious historian ac-

cepts that the experienced Barcelona working class could have been brought to the pitch that they were in May 1937 by a handful of agent provocateurs. Hugh Thomas, the liberal historian who in the first edition of his book accepted the plausability of this story, in his new edition of *The Spanish Civil War* points out that: "spies are boastful, and that one may have attributed the spontaneous outbreak of fighting to his own intrigues. Franco must have also have been anxious to suggest the efficacy of his intelligence service to the Germans" (page 656). The very statement of Faupel, which Johnstone reproduces—"the agent succeeded in having shooting starting in the streets, which then led to the desired results" shows that the spies' boasts were false. In fact the Barcelona uprising was precipitated not by 'shooting in the streets' but by the attack of the Stalinists on the Barcelona telephone exchange, a symbol of workers' power throughout Catalonia.

### CP MEMBERSHIP

Johnstone condemns the Barcelona workers' action as "civil war within civil war". Yet in the days leading up to the May events the Spanish workers had seen the march of the bourgeoisie and Stalinist counter revolution against the gains of the revolution. Workers' patrols were being systematically disarmed by the re-constructed police and civil guards, the factory committees were being sabotaged and undermined by government representatives and the collectives discriminated against by the government agencies. Following the defeat of the Barcelona uprising a mass offensive was launched against the working class. The weak collectivisation decree forced on the government in October 1936 was repudiated and the physical annihilation of all those who could act as a pole of attraction for the working class began. What was this but "civil war" against the gains of the revolution?

Monty Johnstone regrets the crimes of the GPU in Spain and pleads that this was not an essential part of the Spanish CP's Popular Front strategy. On the contrary, as Trotsky pointed out at the time, "Azana and Company needed Stalin as an experienced executioner with the authority of a revolutionist. Without him, so insignificant a crew never could nor would have dared to attack the workers". The pacemaker of the counter revolution in Republican Spain was the Communist Party. All those who wished to see the defeat of the revolution or wanted it to be diverted into 'democratic' channels hid behind it and within its ranks. Monty Johnstone challenges Ted Grant—it is true not with complete confidence—on the social com-

position of the CP during the Civil War: "Ted Grant however blandly tells us—without disclosing his sources—that 'two-thirds of the (party's) membership were composed of shopkeepers, foremen, small businessmen, rich peasants, top levels of technicians etc. Only one third was composed of workers—mostly the most backward section of the working class'."

Yet the official CP publications completely bear out Ted Grant's point. Thus in Madrid, according to its own figures in 1938, it had only 10,160 trade unionists out of 63,426 members! Also Diaz gave the following figures—which probably inflated the number of industrial workers—of CP membership:

**Industrial Workers 87,660**  
**Agricultural Workers 62,250**  
**Peasants 76,700**  
**Middle Class 15,485**  
**Intellectuals &**  
**Liberal Professions 7,045**  
**From *Por la unidad hacia la victoria***

Thus even official figures show that the industrial workers were a minority in the CP. Felix Morrow shows in his book how the federation of traders, small businessmen and manufacturers, the "Federaciones de Gremios y Entidades de Pequeños Comerciantes e Industriales (GEPCI)" was taken bodily into the Catalan section of the UGT, but repudiated by the UGT nationally! Morrow also demonstrates (on page 153 of his book) that the Stalinists were for 'unions' which embraced both workers and employers! He remarks: "Would the most reactionary trade union bureaucrat of the stamp of Ernest Bevin propose that bosses and workers be in one 'union'? No, that vast step backward could only come from the Stalinists, aping Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany."

As Spain moves into another period of revolutionary upheaval the leaders of the Communist Party, followed by the Socialist Party leaders, are serving up to the Spanish worker the warmed over policies which led to the disaster of the Civil War. The reformist degeneration of the CP leaps from every page of Santiago Carrillo's book. The following extracts underline this:

"Events in Portugal are proof (of the correctness of the CP's position) and show that those are correct who, like ourselves, advocate a rapprochement of the working class, the most liberal section of the army and the dynamic bourgeoisie which is interested in political change . . ."

"... It is a fact that we pose the question of a relatively peaceful transition from one bourgeois system to another bourgeois system..."

"... Since the days of Marx and Lenin the state has undergone a vast change... It is no longer the fascist apparatus of the past with some retouching it might also suit a bourgeoisie state..."

## MASSES MOVE INTO ACTION

Matching deeds to words the CP leaders have embraced the Royalist flag and used the Workers Commissions to prevent a general strike following the recent murders in the Basque country. As with their Portuguese cousins in the first period following the April 1974 revolution, they see socialism as the music of a vague and distant future. They wish to limit the struggle to the 'achievement of democracy'. But the Spanish workers will see the granting of democratic rights as the means whereby they can re-capture what they have lost under forty years of fascist slavery. The elections in June will not dampen down the movement of the workers and small peasants. On the contrary it will open the floodgates. The Bonapartist constitution of Juan Carlos, which concentrates the final say in the hands of the King rather than Parliament, is a guarantee of conflict and clashes between the regime and the workers' parties. At the same time enfeebled Spanish capitalism will be incapable of satisfying the demands of the aroused Spanish masses. Notwithstanding the false policies of their leaders the Spanish workers and peasants will drive in the direction of the socialist revolution as their Portuguese brothers have done since 1974. But a pre-condition for victory over capitalism is that the new generation of workers should absorb the lessons of the Revolution of 1931-37. Monty Johnstone's pamphlet and Santiago Carrillo's book are calculated to throw dust in the eyes of those workers seeking the truth about this period. It is the analysis of Leon Trotsky and pamphlets like this which can politically arm Spanish and British workers for the mighty events which impend in the Iberian peninsula.

May 1977

# THE SPANISH REVOLUTION

by Ted Grant

Spain is in the first stages of a movement in the direction of revolution. The fascist regime is completely undermined. The working class has recovered from the terrible defeat inflicted by the forces of reaction in the Civil War. The middle class is filled with hatred for the dictatorship and looking with sympathy to the struggle of the workers. The bourgeoisie is looking for a way out as it feels the pressure of the masses.

The repressive machine of the dictatorship has been enfeebled as it loses all mass support. From a totalitarian fascist state, relying on the state machinery of oppression and repression—consequently it has become transformed into a bonapartist rather than a fascist regime. This marks the beginning of its downfall.

Once the workers, peasants and middle class begin to move into action on a concentrated national scale, the hour for the collapse of the regime will have arrived. The great revenge of the working class will begin. By what regime will the Franco dictatorship be replaced? That is the immediate burning question facing the Spanish proletariat and the Socialist Party and Young Socialists of Spain.

The British Marxists, in the spirit of international solidarity, (the Spanish revolution is also their revolution, as is every revolution in the world) are turning out some material on the Spanish question for discussion within their ranks and internationally. This study of the origins and course of the revolution of 1931-37 is not intended to be comprehensive but to deal with some of the highlights of this period of history of the Spanish workers' movement.

Unless the Spanish Socialist Marxists have a clear conception of these events, they will not be able to orient the movement and prepare policies in line with the perspectives of Spain at the present time. The lessons of history, if they are not learned, point to the situation where there can be an even more terrible debacle for the proletariat.

Marx and Engels worked out their theoretical conceptions on the basis of the experience of the working class, which they generalised into theory. The conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat was worked out by Marx on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune.

Lenin and Trotsky prepared the victory of the revolution of October 1917 in Russia by the study of the lessons of the Paris Com-

mune and the defeated revolution of 1905. Without this, the success of the Russian revolution would have been impossible. Similarly, without a thorough study of the lessons of the defeated Spanish revolution, it will be impossible for the victory of the Spanish socialist revolution to be prepared in the coming days. The history of Spain is rich in lessons. "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." That is why, especially with the difficulties of the Spanish comrades in illegal conditions to have access to the necessary material, we make no apologies for turning out material for discussion in Spain. We consider it our imperative, fraternal and internationalist duty to discuss together with the Spanish comrades the class issues of the coming revolution in order to try to assist, however modestly, in arming the cadres of the Spanish socialists for the tasks looming ahead.

A victorious Spanish revolution would be a victory for the working class of the whole of Europe and would prepare the collapse of capitalism in Latin America and in parts of Africa. It has world-wide implications. Spain is the key to the international situation. Therefore, the responsibility of the leadership of the Spanish proletariat is all the greater. But the key to victory in Spain lies in understanding the lessons of the revolution of 1931-37. Trotsky once explained that the heroism of the Spanish workers was such as to have made ten victorious revolutions in the period 1931-37. Therefore a study of the lessons of this period will arm the cadres against repeating the mistakes of the past.

Spain even today remains a backward country where the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution have not been carried out. The bourgeois-landlord regime with a narrow economic base, and without mass support, was defeated in its colonial war against Moroccan independence in 1921-25 and had to be rescued by the armies of French imperialism. This inglorious and expensive adventure, with the exposure of the corruption and incompetence of the monarchist regime, led to the setting up of the bonapartist-military police dictatorship—Primo de Rivera. This, like all bonapartist dictatorships, tried to balance between the classes in order to maintain the power of the ruling class. The CNT unions, the CP and the anarchists were illegalised, but the Socialist Party and the UGT were allowed to maintain legal existence. Caballero, leader of the UGT, even became a Privy Councillor under the dictatorship!

With the world economic slump of 1929, the basis of the regime was undermined and in an attempt to save the monarchy the King dismissed Primo de Rivera in 1930. But the deepening of the slump hit Spain hard, and the bourgeoisie and landlords tried to unload the burden onto the shoulders of the workers and peasants. There was terrible suffering and hunger among the workers and peasants as



their already low standards and wages were cut by the ruling class.

In the municipal elections of April 1931 the towns, especially the big towns, with the exception of Cadiz, voted overwhelmingly for the candidates of the Socialists and republicans.

In a rigged poll, in the countryside, under the pressure of the aristocracy and landlords, monarchists gained the majority. But this did not reflect the real feelings of the peasants as events were to demonstrate—it merely showed the terror of the landlords and their agents the caciques.

In the towns, mass demonstrations of the workers took place when the election results were announced. Spain was moving towards revolution, so powerful was the movement that the monarchy had to be sacrificed by the ruling class. Hurriedly Alfonso abdicated and fled the country. The Republic was proclaimed. The revolution had begun. A “glorious, peaceful, democratic era of reconciliation of the people had begun”, according to the Socialist and republican leaders. After the elections which followed, a coalition of republicans and Socialists was formed. This coalition, because of the world capitalist crisis and the crisis of capitalism and landlordism in Spain, was unable to carry out its promises. A whole series of strikes of the workers were broken and repressed. Attempts by the peasants to seize the land were answered by using the police and troops to suppress these ‘illegal activities’. The consequence of this was the growth of despair, apathy and inertia among the working class, and especially among the peasants. The CNT and Anarchists engaged in a whole series of isolated seizures and local insurrections which were bloodily repressed.

## ULTRA LEFTISM

The Communist Party, in common with all the parties of the then Communist International, had the insane line of “social fascism” denouncing all other tendencies in the labour movement as social fascists, and declaring the Republican-Socialist coalition government to be a ‘fascist government’. Thus they added to the confusion and disorganisation of the labour movement by this infantile and ultra-left policy.

This coalition or Popular Front government, as the ‘Communist’ Party nowadays terms it, failed to solve a single one of the basic tasks of the bourgeois revolution in Spain. (At the present time, by changing the name of such a coalition with the liberals, the CP pretend to change the reality of class relations.)

Today, within the ranks of the revolutionaries, within the Socialist Party in Spain, there is still a lack of clarity in our opinion on this question of the ‘bourgeois democratic revolution’ in Spain, so it is

necessary to make a short analysis of the question which is borne out by Spanish experience.

For a hundred years the incapacity of the Spanish capitalists to carry the bourgeois revolution to a conclusion has always ended in the defeat of the revolution and the victory of the reaction.

The Spanish bourgeoisie developed late on the scene like the Russian bourgeoisie. By the time it was fully formed it was already being challenged for the supremacy and leadership of the nation by the proletariat.

It had many links with the landowners and even the aristocracy. The banks had mortgages on the land. The landowners invested in industry.

The Church was simultaneously the biggest landowner and the biggest capitalist. Consequently the main task of the bourgeois revolution, the re-distribution of the land and the expropriation of the landlord class, as in Russia, could not be carried out by the capitalists without undermining the capitalist system. Faced with this situation, the republicans, like the Cadets (Constitutional Democrats) in Russia, preferred always to do a deal with reaction.

As the description of events in Spain will show, the republicans, representatives of capitalism, could not solve the tasks of the bourgeois revolution.

Lenin and Trotsky, especially the latter, in a country with a similar social structure, understood this problem. They taught the workers to have an implacable and irreconcilable attitude towards the cowardly, liberal representatives of capitalism.

With the theory of 'Permanent Revolution' advanced by Trotsky even before the 1905 revolution, he explained that because the capitalists, in consequence of their vested interests, could not give the land to the peasants, take action against the Church and the monarchy—the bureaucratic semi-feudal state—but would always attempt to compromise with it, against the workers and peasants, then the task of carrying out the bourgeois revolution falls to the proletariat. But the proletariat, having come to power, abolished the monarchy and assisted the peasants to take the land, would not stop there. The proletariat, having carried out the tasks of the bourgeois revolution with the support of the peasants and petit-bourgeoisie, would not abandon power but would pass on to the socialist tasks by dispossessing the capitalists. But socialism cannot be built in one country. With the accomplishment of the revolution in Russia, the revolution would spread to the most advanced countries in Europe where the proletariat would be affected and stirred by the Russian revolution.

The revolution in Russia developed as worked out theoretically by Trotsky. It provoked revolution in Germany, Austria and Hungary,

and a revolutionary situation in France, Britain and Italy.

For many reasons which cannot be dealt with here, none of these revolutions and revolutionary situations ended in victory, and consequently the revolution in Russia was isolated. This led to the reaction of Stalinism which was to take a terrible toll of the revolutionary movement in the world, especially in Spain.

The Republican-Socialist government of 1931-33 was unable to solve the problems facing the Spanish people because it was a government including representatives of the capitalists. Peasants driven by hunger attempted to seize land and were met by bloody repression by the police and army. Workers striking for higher wages were met by repression and force by the government. The despair and disillusionment of the workers and peasants paved the way for reaction, especially in the countryside.

In the journal of the Communist Party, *International Press Correspondence*, while defending the policy of Popular Frontism, on page 94 in its issue of 1st August 1936, there is an article entitled "Secrets of Spain" which admits the failure of the republicans to solve the problems of the bourgeois democratic revolution:

" 'Que te de a comer la Republica?' (What are the Republic giving you to eat?) ask the peasants. This is one of the great questions in Spain. Where the land problem dominates politics, because out of four Spaniards three are peasants (at that time EG) . . . Extreme misery is without doubt a characteristic of them all . . . About 1931, 1,173,000 peasants owned six million hectares and 105,000 landowners 12 million hectares. five million land workers (agricultural proletarians) owned nothing . . .

"In 1873 the first Republic promised the peasants land. It was overthrown because it did not keep its promise. In 1931 the Republic of 14th April renewed the promise . . . The law was passed on 15th September. It affected a large number of tracts of land, which were to be taken over with or without compensation . . . Also the feudal or non-feudal properties of the Jesuits, as well as those of the Spanish grandes and the monarchists who took part in the coup d'etat of Sanjurjo, were taken over without compensation—farms—cultivated or poorly cultivated—with compensation—in other words, the land was not given to the peasants as freehold property: it was and is granted to them on lease, for which they pay rent to the Institute (of Agrarian Reform) . . . This law was a compromise between the claim of the socialists and the resistance of the bourgeoisie; . . . 5 years after the establishment of the second Republic agrarian reform had hardly started . . ."

Caballero, leader of the left socialists, later condemned the socialist coalition with the capitalists in the first years of the republic, but did not draw all the necessary conclusions from it.

By the time of the next election in October 1933, reaction had taken advantage of the failure of the republicans and Socialists. Women had been enfranchised and came under the pressure of the priests to vote for reactionary candidates. In the general disillusion, the right republicans of Lerroux and the clerical fascists of Gil Robles made big gains. The latter engaged in the usual demagoguery of the fascists.

But the coming to power of Hitler in 1933, the crushing of the Austrian workers in February 1934 alarmed the international working class. They saw the suppression of the workers' organisations and the taking away of the hard-won rights of the German and Austrian workers. They were reduced to the condition of slaves. The Spanish workers were determined that the same thing would not happen to them.

Under the influence of this mood, Caballero secretly organised the importation of arms, and armed many socialist militants. Caballero issued a warning, as the Lerroux government moved further towards reaction and began discussions with the leader of the CEDA of clerical fascism, Gil Robles. The working class would never tolerate the coming into the government of the fascists as this would mean a move towards the destruction of their organisations and rights.

Lerroux vacillated and then took the CEDA representatives into the cabinet. The Socialist Party replied by organising a general strike, and in Asturias and Catalonia, armed insurrection.

This resulted in the seizure of Asturias by the workers, and the organisation of the Asturian Commune. This could have succeeded were it not for the stupidity of the anarchists. Arguing that this was a 'struggle between politicians' and had not the Republican-Socialist coalition suppressed and even shot them, they blacklegged and even transported on the railways the troops sent to crush the Asturian Commune. The Moors of the Foreign Legion under General Franco brutally crushed the movement.

Many workers were executed and tens of thousands imprisoned, but because the workers had fought arms in hand, the spirit of resistance remained uncurbed. Unlike the betrayal of the German workers by the Communist and Socialist Party leaders, it was impossible to consolidate a fascist regime.

There followed the Bien Negrio (The Two Black Years), but the struggle of the workers continued. The Communist Party, at the behest of the Stalinist regime in Moscow, had changed the 'line'. They dropped the Stalinist theory of "social fascism" without explanation. In its place they put the discredited theory, implacably condemned by Lenin, of coalition with the 'liberal' bourgeoisie, which they refurbished, in order to make it more palatable to their members and the working class, as the theory of the 'People's Front' or Popular Front.

The bourgeoisie in Spain found themselves in difficulties. They could not maintain the reactionary government in power. They felt the rising tide of resistance of the workers and of the peasants. Under these conditions they had recourse to the "strike-breaking" conspiracy of the 'People's Front' as Trotsky termed it. The POUM and the Anarchists joined with the Socialist Party, Communist Party and 'left' republican parties to form the Popular Front.

Because of the experience of the workers of the 'left' republicans in the period of 1931-33, they were distrustful of the republicans, and the leaders of the Communist and Socialist parties, behind the scenes to their members presented the People's Front as a 'manoeuvre' where they were 'using' the liberal leaders. That is the way they persuaded their members to accept it.

However, in the elections of February 1936, because of the rising tide of radicalisation of the workers and of the peasants, the Popular Front slate was victorious. As a result of the Popular Front agreement the Left Republicans were given far more seats to contest than their real support in the population would warrant, with the result that their number of deputies as compared with the workers' parties was inflated. The Popular Front secured 268 seats, of which the bourgeois left republicans held 153. The Communist Party won 16 seats and the Socialist Party 98. The right wing parties secured 157 seats, and the so-called centre parties 48 seats. However, the vote for the right was inflated by the terror and intimidation especially in the villages. So in reality the Popular Front victory was much greater.

The working class, which had learned to distrust the liberals through bitter experience between 1931 and 1933, immediately moved into action. Within days by direct action they carried out the Popular Front programme. Holidays with pay, 44 hour week and wage increases were imposed on the employers. Without waiting for an amnesty the workers marched to the jails, tore down the walls where necessary, and released the 30,000 political prisoners still languishing there as a result of the general strike and the Asturian insurrection. They imposed conditions on the employers not in the Popular Front programme. They expelled the fascists and blacklegs, who had been taken on after the defeat of 1934, from the factories. They forced the employers to re-employ the tens of thousands victimised and to reinstate them with two years back pay.

The reason for the Popular Front victory in the elections is indicated in the *International Press Correspondence* of 4th April 1936, page 461:

"Not one of the questions raised by the bourgeois democratic revolution has been solved. On the contrary, they have become more acute. The unbearable political, social and economic situation which

the parties of the right, by their reactionary and fatal policy, have created for the toiling masses, the workers, peasants, clerks, small shopkeepers, etc.

"The great experience which the masses have acquired in all their former struggles, and above all, from the insurrectionary movements of October 1934, the heroic deeds of the workers of Asturias.

## WORKERS UNDER ATTACK

"The two years of government of the Radicals and the CEDA were characterised by a constant state of emergency. The workers and peasants were deprived of all their achievements. The strikes and movements of the workers and peasants for their demands and for immediate improvements were brutally throttled and suppressed. Attacks upon and murders of workers by the fascist gangs, who were protected by the government were a 'normal' everyday occurrence in Spain. Workers' organisations were persecuted and dissolved and their premises closed, meetings and conferences of workers were prohibited.

"100 death sentences, 30,000 imprisoned and tortured . . . The landowners and capitalists reduced the wages and worsened the already miserable living conditions of the workers . . . The wages of the workers in the towns were reduced from 10-12 pesetas to 4-5 pesetas. Wages in the countryside were reduced from 8-9 pesetas to 1.50 pesetas for men and 60 centimes for women, for a working day lasting from sunrise to sunset . . .

"Unemployment increased from 536,100 in 1933 to 780,242 in 1935. As a matter of fact, however, there are more than one and a half million unemployed in Spain. The budget for 1933 provided 873 million pesetas for public works, but the 1935 Budget provided only 628 million . . ."

In its issue of 29th February 1936, the *IPC* deals with the results of the election victory:

"But Spain shows also something else, namely that the People's Front is not a parliamentary coalition (!!)

"The working people of Spain, however, gathered in the streets and shouted out with firm resolution 'We are not going to wait until parliament meets and repeals or does not repeal the reactionary laws! Open the workers' clubs and meeting places at once! Open the prison gates at once!' The armed forces appeared on the scene. But like the glorious fighters of the Commune and every people's revolution, the masses fraternised with the troops; they won them over to their side . . .

"The fate of the coup d'etat (being prepared by Franco and the

generals) was thereby sealed. Of course the gates of the prisons were opened, just as the doors of the workers' clubs and meeting places had already been opened. . . .

"The state and municipal employees and also other workers who had been dismissed during and after the October 1934 for having taken part in the fighting were reinstated and on the other hand, many employees who had acted as strike-breakers in October were dismissed (in Madrid municipality alone over 1,000). The reactionary agrarian measures were rescinded.

"We read in the London Sunday papers that the Chief of the General Staff, general Franco, the friend of Gil Robles, and General Goded the Chief of the Air Force, who were at the head of the proposed military coup d'etat were simply removed from their positions instead of being stood up against the wall. It is highly probable that all the authorities, all the judges who took part in crushing and sentencing the October fighters are still holding their positions."

## INDEPENDENT ACTION

The masses moved independently. What was necessary was to organise them, to increase and strengthen their distrust of the liberal government. As the liberal *News Chronicle* of July 20, 1936 announced of the programme of Azana's government: "With the support of the left (who still refused actually to join the government) his (Azana's EG) government announced a programme which was nothing more radical than a return to the constitution of 1931, with quite ordinary reforms such as new schools, public works and the revision of the banking system." It was necessary to begin the setting up of independent committees and prepare the taking of power by the masses. They clearly were not prepared to rely on the discredited liberals. In the same issue of *IPC* on page 294, in a letter from Spain, it reports in a way that unconsciously condemns root and branch the whole policy of Popular Frontism:

"The masses of the people are reaping the fruits of their victory in a way very different from what happened after the fall of the monarchy in 1931. While at that time the masses poured onto the streets with a great deal of noise and rejoicing, their action now is much calmer and more far-reaching. . . .

"In general the movement of the masses all over the country is aimed at independent action. All the efforts of the government and its press to hold the masses back have only had the effect of increasing their militant spirit and strengthening their desire to act on their own." (my emphasis).

*Claridad*, the organ of the left socialist Largo Caballero, writes as follows:



**“We shall be on the side of the government in order to help it to carry out the Joint Programme with all the necessary determination, even if this programme does not satisfy us entirely. We will, however, not give the government our unreserved confidence as we did from 1931-33. The lesson was too hard, and we will not renounce our right to criticise in order to maintain the vigilance of the working class, which is now marching forward to the final goal of our class, and, at the slightest sign of weakening, to set the working class itself against its present allies.” (my emphasis throughout!)**

This course, dictated by the distrust of the ‘liberal’ capitalist representatives by the masses, and their pressure was nevertheless false. It should have been the duty of the ‘left’ socialists to put no trust in the lying promises of the liberals, in the circumstances of Spain at that time. They should have reinforced and strengthened the distrust of the masses and prepared for the inevitable struggle by constructing organs of an incipient character, even at that stage. That was what the masses were striving for even if inarticulately and in a certain sense unconsciously, as indicated by the attitude and actions of the workers’ parties.

Behind the screen, under the protection of the Popular Front government, the conspiracy of the generals, monarchists and fascists began immediately. A comedy of musical chairs began. Franco was transferred to the Canary Islands, General Sanjurjo and De Llano were moved to Balearics and Morocco and to Seville. The Army Command was shuffled around.

The syndicalists, Socialist and even Communist Party press were warning of the danger of a fascist or military uprising. But the Socialist Party and CP all exhorted the government “to take action”.

**This was impossible, if one accepts the Marxist analysis of class society. The republicans were representatives, in one way or another, of capitalism. The power of capitalism depends on the power of the state machine, which is composed of the army, police, courts and prisons etc. The ruling class, both in its liberal and conservative or fascist form depends on the support of army generals and officers of the army caste, police officers and the top civil servants, who have been specially selected and picked and educated to serve the capitalist system. To take action against these would be to undermine and destroy the whole basis of the capitalist state. To ask liberals to do this is like asking a tiger to turn vegetarian. For class reasons this is impossible!**

That is why, right up to the insurrection, the bleats of the workers’ leaders about the government ‘taking action’, if it had any effect, merely tended to lull the working class and to prevent them from taking the necessary action themselves.

The Popular Front government did not take action against the



fascist army officers. How could they when it meant the destruction of the state machine on which the ruling class relies?

At the same time the big capitalists, lavishly supplying them with funds, unleashed their reserve weapon: the fascist bands against the organisations of the working class. A little over two months after the "Great Victory", Cesar Falcon was complaining in the *International Press Correspondence* pages:

"Since the electoral victory of the people, the fascist gangs, recovered from the momentary dismay . . . incited by the reactionary leaders, and especially by the big landowners, have started a campaign of provocation and assault extending all over the country . . . Madrid . . . villages . . . with the full co-operation of the fascist elements in the army and in the Civil Guard . . . They relied mainly on the passivity of the Popular Front government" (my emphasis).

"The Ministry of the Interior which had pledged itself to a constitutional and tolerant attitude, hesitated (?) to take those vigorous measures which both the nature of the offence and popular opinion were demanding . . . assault on the Spanish deputy for Madrid . . . The young students belonging to the Spanish Falange tried to murder Largo Caballero and bomb the home of Ortego Y Gasset—liberal . . . The leniency of the government only drove the fascists further.

"Jiminez Asua—SSP Madrid Deputy—The fascists immediately replied by murdering a judge . . . What speedy and drastic steps were then taken against the fascist provocateurs and criminals? Not one." (my emphasis).

Constantly up to the period of the army uprising in July 1936, the workers parties were appealing to the Popular Front liberal government to 'take action'. They behaved as the Social Revolutionary and Menshevik leaders behaved after the February revolution in 1917. Also the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Kamenev and Stalin, up till the arrival of Lenin, used the formula "support for the Provisional government in so far as . . .". It was Lenin's April Theses opposing this and demanding preparations for a new revolution, patiently explaining this to the masses, which won the overwhelming support of the rank and file, making the victory of the Russian revolution possible.

Adoption of this standpoint of the Spanish CP and SP would have resulted in the shipwreck of the revolution. The policies of the leaders of these parties were as if plagiarised from the policies of Menshevism and Social Revolutionarism. More correctly they were a helpless response to the pressures of class conflict and their failure to implement clear class policies.

After gaining the promises of the government to take action and dissolve the fascist organisations, two months later in the issue of

June 4th of *IPC*, Vicente Uribe writes: "the courts of justice, before which the fascists are brought, either acquit them or sentence them to two months imprisonment, a mere parody of justice. In innumerable cases fascists have been acquitted of charges of murder. This mildness and complicity where fascists are concerned contrasts vividly with the barbarous penalties imposed on the workers during the period in which reaction was in power, and with the punishment still dealt out by the courts to workers found with arms in their possession." (My emphasis)

## OFFICERS' TREACHERY

The courts, the police, the army and the civil service top layers are the basis of the state, and consequently it was baying at the moon to expect the liberal politicians who represent the bourgeoisie to destroy their own state machine and leave themselves entirely without defence from any assault by the masses, especially as the army officers had gone over overwhelmingly to the reaction.

In its issue of July 4th the *IPC* reported in an article entitled "Secrets of Spain": "There are only a few republican officers. I was told that there were 3% . . . then an officer who works for the Chief of Staff told me . . . 'Your informant is an optimist . . . there are perhaps 100 officers of whom one can be failure sure' . . ."

Army generals and officers ignored orders, fraternised with fascists and provoked the workers into conflicts. They ceaselessly prepared a bloody settlement with the workers.

Meanwhile the Popular Front was incapable of carrying out fundamental reforms in the interests of the workers and the peasants. The land question had bedevilled Spain for more than a century and a half.

The liberals were incapable of solving the problem of the bourgeois democratic revolution.

Castrillo Santos in his book *Four Years of Republican Experiment 1931-35* declared: "95% of the total agricultural undertakings in Spain comprise only about five million hectares of land, whilst 0.35% of the total comprise nine million hectares. One million owners possess six million hectares, whilst 100,000 owners possess 12 million hectares. These statistics represent in the last resort the social problems of Spanish agriculture."

*IPC* says in its issue of June 4th: "30,000 landowners own two-thirds of Spain" and commenting on the role of the Spanish capitalists say: "Sabotage of the agrarian revolution when it has gained office with the assistance of the revolutionary forces, and then a repentant return to the camp of reaction in order to crush with its assistance the rebellious workers and poor peasants and re-

establish order”.

In the six months of the Popular Front, 190,000 landless peasants gained land. This was two and a half percent of the peasants.

In the articles *Secrets of Spain* continued in the issue of August 1936, page 27, it deals with the attitude of the capitalists and big landowners: “In words they declared their readiness to reconcile themselves to the democratic public which had been created in Spain. But actually they began with economic sabotage and underhand intrigues immediately after the overthrow of their government.

“The financial oligarchy began to transfer its capital abroad. The most despicable stock exchange sharks began to undermine the standard of the peseta. . . the big manufacturers demanded the annulment of the government measures which were intended to alleviate the want of the broad masses of the people, failing which they threatened lock-outs.

“The big landlords, supported by the bankers, threatened a ‘strike’ by declaring that unless the government desisted from its plans for agrarian reform. . . they would not proceed with autumn sowing. . . the government displayed extreme tolerance towards the reactionary elements who had suffered a common defeat at the elections. Despite the warnings and advice of the workers organisations, the leaders of the monarchists and the fascists were allowed to remain in freedom, even remaining in high positions in the army, the navy and inside the state machine. . .

“The condition of the peasants and the landworkers was that of starvation and semi-starvation. Less than one in forty received any land as a result of land reform: 190,000 out of eight million. . . There are villages in Hurdes in le Mancha. . . where the peasants in absolute despair revolt no longer. They eat roots and fruit. . . Thirty miles from Madrid, the villagers exist on soup made from bread, water, oil and vinegar. . .

“The caciques still have some power. . . the usurers are still carrying on their rapacious business and not all the big landowners have been dispossessed. One has seen how in Almenoralejo, in the province of Badajoz, twenty millionaires are systematically starving one of the richest corners of Spain by refusing even to discuss the question of the wages of the landworkers. . . Not all the land is under cultivation.

“What has the republic given you to eat? Things should be speeded up to the starved peasants it seems. . . The peasant leaders calculate that the agrarian law plans 50,000 settlements a year, which means that it will take 20 years to settle a million peasants: more than a century to give land to all.”

In Russia, before the October revolution, the bourgeoisie reckoned that it would take about a quarter century to measure out and

divide the land and therefore land reform was impractical. The peasants under the leadership of the working class and of the Bolshevik Party achieved the agrarian revolution in days by seizing the land.

In Spain too the peasants began to seize the land, but unlike the Bolsheviks, neither the Socialist or Communist Party leaders made it their policy to carry out the agrarian revolution:

The peasants provide the broad infantry of the revolution. The working class under modern conditions is the decisive class and the driving force in the revolution. In Spain the gains in wages made by working class militancy were cancelled out by inflation. There were constant clashes between workers and employers. The police and the fascists were used by the bosses to try and terrorize the working class. All these attempts failed. The workers were tempered and fired in the struggle. They were not demoralised by the failures of the trade union and Socialist and Communist leaders to press home the attack. The reaction grew more and more alarmed.

## DAILY CLASHES

After the murder of Calvo Sotelo, spokesman for the monarchist reaction and fascism, by Civil Guard policemen in reprisal for the murder of their Socialist police lieutenant by the fascists, both the fascists and monarchists withdrew from parliament. This was in preparation for the fascist rising.

This incident merely precipitated the preparations being made by the army generals since the February elections. The capitalists were thoroughly alarmed by the mood and combativity of the working class.

Daily clashes were taking place between the workers and the fascists. On July 5th, 1936, the *Times* reported: "Two fascists were murdered on Thursday. . . . As a reprisal men armed with a sub-machine gun opened fire on Friday night on a group of men who were leaving the union headquarters, killing two and injuring five".

On July 13th the *Times* reported that on the previous day "six armed men entered the union broadcasting station at Valencia. . . . and after having over-powered the speaker and his assistant, one of them announced through the microphone that fascist forces had seized all the strategic points of the town. The men had disappeared before the police could arrive.

"In spite of the lateness of the hour, republican (?) and other left groups organised a demonstration of protest, which paraded the streets. The mob set fire to the headquarters of the Regional Party, which is the principal party of the right, and the building was destroyed. There was an attempt to burn the building of the

newspaper . . . The house of the right politician, Senor Lucia and the furniture of one of the largest cafes . . . several political clubs of the right wing were set on fire."

The economic situation is indicated in the report of the *Times* of July 14th, 1936, almost on the eve of the insurrection. "The budgetary deficit has become chronic. The peseta is sinking whilst trade languishes owing to the rising cost of production and failure to pay for imports."

## SHOWDOWN

The capitalists felt the need to crush the trade unions and workers organisations so that they could drive down the living standards of the workers. Because of the economic and political impasse in which they found themselves, one conflict after the other had been taking place between the workers and the bosses in industry and on the land. There were 113 general strikes and 228 partial strikes between February and July in the cities and towns of Spain. Therefore the capitalists were demanding that 'order' be restored, i.e. that terror must be used to subjugate the working class.

The classes were preparing their forces for the showdown. The *Times* of July 15, 1936, reported that: "the monarchists and traditionalists issued a statement: Senor Calvo Sotelo's murder was a true 'state crime' without precedent in Spain.

"It (murder) had become possible as a result of the incitement to violence against deputies of the right expressed in parliament. The note adds that the monarchists cannot continue to collaborate in state plunged into anarchy."

On the other hand Lieutenant Castillo's funeral was arranged for 6am by the authorities to try and prevent demonstrations. In spite of this there were immense crowds. The "body was saluted with clenched fists. The coffin was draped in a red flag . . . socialist militias with banners paraded."

The stage was being set for a struggle to the death between the workers and the forces of capitalism and landlordism. The entire false policy of the leaders of the labour movement from February and throughout the civil war was indicated in the statement of Largo Caballero in an interview with the *London News Chronicle* on July 9th, 1936: "Do you believe that the change from this republican government to a Socialist government will be accomplished by a ballot? . . . That I do not know, *really there would be no republicans without us. We are their strength and if we withdraw our support they are gone.*" (my emphasis)

Significant words when one considers the course of the civil war and the actions of Largo Caballero and other workers' leaders in the

ensuing conflict.

The army generals and officers had been preparing the rising from the first days of the Popular Front government. From July 17th, the rising began in Morocco and the Canary Islands. The Popular Front government tried to hide the news from the Spanish people. When it could no longer be suppressed, Quiroga the Prime Minister, and the government tried to pretend that this did not affect the mainland. The Madrid radio under the control of the government announced on July 18 that "no-one, absolutely no-one on the Spanish mainland, has taken part in this absurd plot," (*The Times*, 20 July, 1936).

The news of the revolt had been radioed to the workers by the sailors of the Spanish fleet who had seized the ships in the Moroccan harbours. A hundred thousand workers in Madrid demonstrated demanding arms. Quiroga, the Prime Minister refused, announcing that "anyone who gave arms to the workers without his orders would be shot." Meanwhile throughout Andalusia according to the arrangements of the conspirators, risings began. Even according to Hugh Thomas, the academic 'historian' of the civil war, "Nearly everywhere on the 18th July the civil governors in the large towns followed the example of the government in Madrid and refused to co-operate fully (!) with the working class organisations who were clamouring for arms." (page 185, of *The Spanish Civil War*).

In Seville, Granada and Cordoba the fascist officers were successful, because after demonstrating and demanding arms the workers were persuaded by the Socialist and Communist Party leaders to go to their homes. The same night the officers armed with lists went to the workers quarters and summarily executed every trade union secretary, Communist Party secretary and Socialist Party secretary and prominent militants on whom they could lay their hands.

Quiroga's government tried to reach a compromise with the fascist generals. The Quiroga government resigned and an even more right wing government of Martinez Barrios took their place.

## COMPROMISE.

They wanted to make an agreement with the fascist officers. They thought that a right wing government could make a compromise.

Had it depended on the liberals the position would have been lost to fascism without a struggle. They feared the movement of the masses far more than they feared the coming to power of Franco. This was a class question. Without the treachery of the bourgeois liberals, the fascists would never have been able to seize any of the

towns in Spain. The insurrection would have been stillborn. But much as they feared a fascist Spain, the liberal politicians feared an armed working class a thousand times more.

The government remained passive in the face of the onslaught of the army. The pathological class fear of the liberals of an armed working class is shown by the reports from all over Spain. It is best indicated by the situation in Valencia more than two weeks after the insurrection. Out of the report of the Communist Party official journal *IPC* itself, in its issue of 5th August 1936, page 987, under the heading "Valencia":

"For fourteen days, since July 18th, a mutineer troop of the 18th cavalry regiment had kept the town in constant insecurity.

"The workers of Valencia, half of them members of the UGT, half of them CNT had been demanding for days that the population should be armed. In order to reinforce the militia and the regulars (how many? EG) making them strong enough to storm the fascist nest. The government members of the nation's Republican Union of Valencia (the moderate republican trend of Martinez Barrios) vacillated and finally refused to distribute arms. There upon the workers declared a general strike, which had already gone on two days before the pressure of the masses finally made the government and the military leaders decide on open action to take the cavalry barracks . . . within a few minutes the workers created barricades of motor lorries . . . the anti-fascist militia, the soldiers and the workers strengthened their positions and were ready to storm in spite of the irresolution of the leaders . . . the workers stormed into the barracks and took rifles without asking anyone."

This speaks volumes for the attitude of the bourgeois 'People's Front' 'allies' of the Communist Party. It hardly requires comment.

However, to the insurrection and counter revolution of the fascists the revolution of the working class came in reply. Beginning with the immortal workers of Barcelona the working class took the initiative. Responding to the call of the sailors who, in many cases had thrown the fascist officers overboard, the Barcelona workers marched against the army. Quoting again the Stalinist correspondent of the *IPC* in the same article under the heading "Barcelona":

"Events have completely refuted the reformist theory according to which it is impossible for the working class in towns with modern broad streets to stand up to any army equipped with modern weapons. The masses of the people of Madrid, Barcelona and dozens of other towns in Spain, with a few pistols, daggers and their bare fists, have rendered an army hors de combat . . . Barcelona . . . the workers told us how the first machine gun was captured: they ran across the huge square with only a small force in the middle as a cover, in the front ranks against a raging fire, the workers in the



front ranks fell dead or wounded, but no one wavered, the advance continued till the workers captured the machine gun . . . when the artillery batteries appeared in the streets . . . the workers mounted light motor lorries and drove suddenly from side streets, at speeds of 120 km.p.h. into the flank of the artillery.

“With the exception of the flying corps, the whole garrison mutinied and it was the masses of workers (my emphasis) the Young Socialists, Communists and republicans who mobilised with amazing rapidity and determination and captured the main positions of the fascist uprising.”

According to the reports of the bourgeois correspondents the courage and ingenuity of the workers was unsurpassed. They marched against the barracks with legs of chairs, table knives and a few sporting guns snatched by breaking into sporting shops. The *Times* of July 24th, 1936 reports from Barcelona: “San Marti . . . streets swarming with men . . . carrying army carbines and pistols . . . armed women . . . in lorries . . . we have taken all the arms from the San Andrea barracks.”

Whole books could be written about the way in which an unarmed working class spontaneously, without guidance from their leaders marched into action against the threat of fascism and defeated the fascists in most towns and in two thirds of Spain. Without the vacillation of the Communist and Socialist Party leadership in the South, it would have been all of Spain.

But now in so-called republican Spain the army was smashed, the police had disappeared and there was only one decisive armed force—the working class.

In the analysis of society made by Marx and Lenin they explained that the power of the state can be reduced to armed bodies of men and their appendages, courts, prisons, etc. In that sense the workers had smashed the capitalist state. They held the power; the ‘Republican’ government was suspended in midair. Most of the factory owners had fled and were supporting Franco. The workers seized the factories and began operating them without the capitalists.

The workers were instinctively trying to change society and begin the socialist revolution. The capitalist class supported Franco. Azana and Companys represented nothing. The leaders of the proletariat refused to accept this initiative of the masses. They made a coalition not with the capitalists but with the shadow of the capitalists; as Trotsky put it, the lawyers, MPs etc, of the liberal parties who in this situation represented nobody but themselves.

The capitalists understood the situation clearly. The before quoted correspondent in the same dispatch continued his report to the *Times* by stating what one of the workers said to him: “A man told me . . . many officers got away and others were arrested. The soldiers



were told they could go where they liked. Is it not nice that the workers should have arms and power." (my emphasis). This rank and file worker understood as undoubtedly did instinctively the mass of the workers that the power was de facto in their hands. It was the leaders of their own organisations who blocked the path of socialist revolution and thus betrayed the revolution and led it on the road of a terrible defeat.

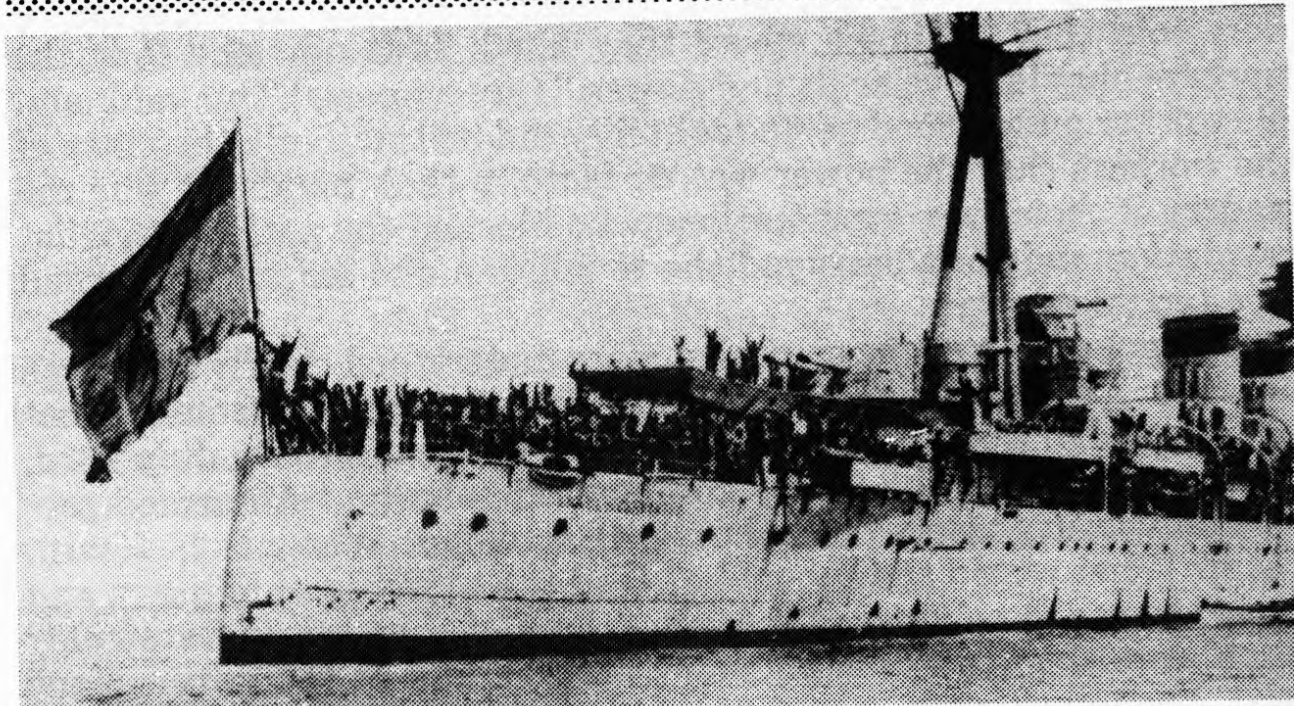
The spokesmen of the capitalist class understood clearly what was at issue. They posed the problem in serious terms, if from the opposing pole of the class struggle as the Marxists did. On July 23rd, 1936, an article in the *Times* commented soberly: "An armed proletariat was in possession of the city (Barcelona). Who was to disarm them? What would the sequel be? Had the uprising of military and armed forces merely paved the way for proletarian rule in Catalonia? Such were the questions on every tongue, and at the government 'war' headquarters it was evident that this question was of paramount concern."

Again indicating the real situation, *The Times* of July 25th, reported: "Barcelona: revolutionary committees composed of anarchists and communists have intervened in factories to an extent that seems nothing short of their seizure . . . the office and technical staff are working under the watch of the proletarians . . . Catalan government issued decree declaring their intention to intervene in all banking in the region . . . appointing a banking commission." (Thus they prevented the workers from seizing control of the banks, a vital measure without which the developing socialist revolution could not go forward. Marx pointed out that the failure of the Paris Commune to seize the banks as a first step, was one of the main factors in its downfall. One of the first steps of the Bolsheviks after the October revolution was the taking over of the banks.)

## DUAL POWER

" . . . Your correspondent has just obtained permission from the revolution committee at Puigcerda to return to Barcelona"

This shows the existence of what Marxists have termed dual power. The government in Barcelona and Madrid had no armed forces on which they could rely. They were suspended by a thread. They could only exist by the toleration of the leadership of the workers parties who were not prepared to brush them aside and thus betrayed the revolution. For the time being they had to tolerate the workers' incipient power. Participating in this betrayal or lack of understanding, was the leadership of all the workers parties: the Socialists, Anarchists, Poumists and above all, as the main force of counter revolution in the workers camp, the leadership of the Communist Par-



July 1936. After killing their officers, sailors fly the Republican flag and give the socialist salute.

ty. They resisted all the strivings of the workers and aborted the growing revolution.

In an article in the liberal *News Chronicle* of July 21st the correspondent relates: "My night's journey by car from Madrid to Barcelona . . . we were stopped every few miles by either gendarmes or pickets of workmen or peasants.

" . . . They (men of the Popular Front) attribute the collapse of their people in the southern cities partly to the fact that in Seville and Granada, for instance, the local authorities failed to act on the instructions (?) of the central government and arm the workmen."

(As we have already quoted Casares Quiroga, there were no instructions by the central government. The liberal republicans found themselves without police or armed forces).

The *News Chronicle* correspondent continued: "The part of Catalonia adjoining the French border is in the hands of a revolutionary committee composed partly of anarchists and partly of communists. The soviet flag (Red flag. EG) is flying on the town hall of Puigcerda . . . Popular Front composed of workmen, partly of peasants . . ."

On July 23rd, the *News Chronicle* wrote of "Crews of practically all the warships seize control . . ." On the same date this journal of the liberal capitalists in Britain, blood brothers of the republican bourgeois party in Spain, wrote in fear and trepidation "Whatever might have been the menace of communism (i.e. the socialist revolution EG) before the fascist generals chose it as a pretext to rise against the republic, it is a reality now. (My emphasis EG)

"Socialist and Communist militia and their elements in the army and navy have been the backbone of the defence against the fascist

onslaught. They are fighting for the republic and the Popular Front but under the red flag.

"The red flag flies from Malaga as well as banners marked 'Union Hermanos Proletarios' (the sign made famous by the proletarian insurrection in the Austrias. EG)

"If the generals are beaten will the crews of the warships that have had a taste of blood and the troops that have ousted their officers be prepared to knuckle down even to republican officers and the workers of the cities be reconciled to a bourgeois republic which they practically alone defended?"

## REVOLUTION BETRAYED

The same issue contained the following item "In Northern Catalonia yesterday communists, socialists and anarchists, armed with weapons captured from defeated rebel troops, are in control. At Puigcerda the workers' army seized the town hall, took control of the city." On July 24 the correspondent reports: "Talking with these members of the workers' militia . . . hardened labourers, skilled artisans, young apprentices . . . Algeciras . . . fascist homes set on fire by workers . . . though town occupied by fascist army . . . the Republicans see the regime already smashed. The Popular Front is ancient history now.

"It is hard to imagine the socialist, communist and syndicalist elements that have borne the brunt of the fighting for the defence of the republic in the south continuing under the tutelage of a handful of purely bourgeois republicans." (My emphasis EG)

This "handful of bourgeois republicans" was to retain decisive control because of the policy of the leadership of all the workers' organisations—Anarchists, Poumist, Socialist and Communist. In one way or another they betrayed the heroic spontaneous reaction to the fascist uprising. They betrayed the elementary class movement of the workers by collaborating with the rotten republican bourgeois leaders, who by this time represented nobody but themselves.

In this dirty work of 'democratic' counter revolution the leadership of the Communist Party played the principal part. They did this under the instructions of Stalin. By this time the parties of the Communist International had become agents of the foreign policy of the Russian bureaucracy. The latter was terrified that a successful socialist revolution in Spain, or in any other country of Western Europe would undermine their power and lead to their overthrow, and the restoration of workers' democracy in Russia. In fact the revolution in Spain stirred the Russian workers more than any event since the usurpation of power by Stalin. In attempting to maintain





A café collectivised by the UGT. In revolutionary Barcelona even hairdressers and bootblacks formed collectives!

their power, through Stalin, the bureaucracy were compelled to launch the 'witch-craft trials', murder practically all the leaders of the revolution and the old Bolsheviks, murdering hundreds of thousands of the rank and file of the Communist Party. This was due partly to the repercussions of the revolution in Spain. Victory to Spanish socialism would have sounded the death knell for the Soviet bureaucracy.

In addition to this the bureaucrats were not concerned with revolutionary diplomacy, as under Lenin, but purely nationalist considerations. They wanted at that time to placate the capitalists of Britain and France, to gain an alliance against Germany. They did not wish to upset this by a revolutionary conflagration which would have spread to France and destroy entirely the world political and social equilibrium.

In Spain the Communist Party set the pace for the betrayal of the revolution and thus the terrible defeat of the working class. But the Communist Party was not the decisive element. Far more powerful were the anarchists and the Socialist Party, the CNT and the UGT.

The anarchists betrayed every principle of anarchism, let alone of socialism. The tenets not to support any government were abandoned, entering the bourgeois government at a time when its basis in the real relationship of class forces had disappeared.

The Prieto right wing socialists stood for collaboration with the republican bourgeoisie, but at that moment would have carried little weight with the rank and file. Had Caballero and the left wing of the Socialist Party stood firmly against such a course, as did Lenin

and Trotsky in Russia in 1917, the situation would have changed fundamentally. The position was far more favourable objectively than in Russia after the revolution of February 1917. The workers were practically the only armed force. They endeavoured to seize industry, as the peasants endeavoured to seize the land. Thus the workers heralded the attempt at socialist revolution that they were instinctively trying to undertake.

Had Caballero and the left socialists organised committees of workers or soviets, in the factories and districts and advocated the setting up of a workers' government, getting rid of the remnants of the capitalists and the representatives of the republicans—capitalist politicians who no longer reflected, directly at least, their class. There was nothing to stand in the way of organising a workers' government and thus a victorious working class who could then have waged a socialist struggle against Franco.

The Poumists in Catalonia dragged at the tail of the anarchists and entered the bourgeois government in Catalonia. Thus preparing their terrible fate at the hands of the Stalinists.

Caballero, surrendered to the pressure of the Stalinists and instead of launching the struggle for power—this is an exaggeration, it would have been only a question of brushing aside the discredited republican representative only of themselves—by calling on the workers to set up their revolutionary juntas and organising socialist power and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Stalinists would have been unable to resist. Had they done so they would have lost the overwhelming majority of their worker followers. The anarchists would have been compelled to follow this lead. The POUM (centrists standing between reformism and Marxism) would have supported and the Prieto wing of the Socialist Party would have been isolated and incapable of resistance. A workers' government could then have begun a revolutionary socialist war against Franco and appealed to the international working class for support. Caballero and the left socialists failed to understand the opportunity and the dangers and thus inevitably prepared the way for the crushing of the revolution and then the victory of Franco.

The *Daily Worker* of July 27th, 1936, reported a speech by the leader of the British Communist Party, Harry Pollitt: "In the light of the present events it can now be seen that a great mistake was made in not removing all the army officers opposed to the people's front... the aim (of the counter revolution) undoubtedly was to destroy the people's Spain and to safeguard the interests of the landlords, feudal families, big capitalists and monarchists, and to check any further possibility of the workers advancing... The workers of the world behind the Spanish people means victory..."

Thus the futile demand that the bourgeois republicans dismantle





Madrid, 20 July 1936. An armed civilian guards officers after they surrendered.

the bulwark of the bourgeois rule—the guardian of its domination and property rights—the army; is repeated just when the spontaneous movement of the proletariat has demonstrated its stupidity, its lulling of the proletariat—leaving them defenceless before the reaction. As well ask the capitalists to voluntarily donate their property to the proletariat, as was done by the utopian socialists, as ask them to dismantle the apparatus of their rule—the state machine—armed bodies of men and their various appendages.

The actions of the fascists were determined by the interests of the landlords, feudal families, and big capitalists, says Pollitt, and was repeated *ad nauseum* by the leaders of the Communist Parties of the world. But to overthrow them was precisely the task of the socialist revolution. To ‘defend property’ and ‘order’ was to defend the interests of the organisers and financiers of the fascist counter revolution. The words of the CP leaders were hopelessly in contradiction. They betrayed the workers while making anti-capitalist statements inconsistently.

## WORKERS MILITIA

On July 27th, 1936, Frank Pitcairn, the correspondent of the *Daily Worker* in Barcelona, wrote: “Among the demands already put forward by various organisations, however, are the immediate nationalisation of the entire merchant marine, and the handing over of a number of vital factories to the trade unions . . .

“The workers’ armed militias will remain a permanent defence corps, taking over most of the functions of the army. Large numbers

of soldiers sent officially on leave to be beyond the influence of fascist officers have already enrolled in the militia."

And again on July 29th: "... Everywhere I found calm confidence and swift progress as the workers develop their controls of affairs in the defence against fascism.

"For example, at Targea, the President of the local committee told me 'The socialisation of all essential products has been an accomplished fact here since last Wednesday. Corn, olives, wine, and all the other main agricultural produce of the area are now the property of the workers, through their co-operatives. This years crops will be entirely owned by the poor peasants. It was first necessary to carry out the reorganisation of the landowners' co-operative which, until last week, consisted of both poor and rich peasants with the latter naturally dominating policy. Now the big landowners have been rejected, the co-operative, which is entirely in the hands of the poor peasants, has taken over all the crops.

"These co-operatives were under the supreme control of the defence committee, on which the labour alliance, and the small bourgeois parties, are also represented.

"... We are now working not for the rich, but for ourselves and for the workers of Barcelona and other cities of Catalonia.

"... Barcelona, there is strict control of prices and heavy fines are imposed for profiteering.

"... The anarchists have issued instructions for the formation of flying squads to deal with looters."

These quotations in the early days of the revolution show the situation developing in Spain—the workers wanted to make the revolution and the peasants of Catalonia and Aragon, following their lead seized the land, going further than the Russian peasants in the early days of the revolution — and collectivised the land.

Harry Pollitt, writing in the *Daily Worker* of July 29th, from Paris: "... The fascists had made their preparations well. When the signal for the revolt was given a fortnight ago only one regiment in the whole of Catalonia had refused to join.

"But the initiative and daring of the masses quickly made itself felt. Seizing what arms were available, the workers took the field and, in 36 hours, had crushed the fascist rising in and around Barcelona.

"The workers militia stormed the barracks, captured rifles and artillery, (My emphasis) improvised primitive tanks, captured the radio centres and quickly passed from the defensive to the offensive.

"Soldiers in the rebel regiments began to desert to the side of the workers' militia. Those who were captured were interned in the barracks and workers were sent to fraternise with them and explain the foul work for which their officers had tried to use them..."

Thus the class lines were clearly drawn. All it required was for the workers under Marxist leadership, to organise their own state, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and begin a revolutionary war against Franco. Yet the CP, in obedience to the dictates of their Stalinist masters in Moscow deliberately muddled the issues. In the *Daily Worker* of July 27th, it states:

"Everyone can now see that the fascists in Spain were able to organise a military revolt not because the government was too 'revolutionary', but precisely it believed (like the Labour leaders) that it could 'shape and adapt the state to its democratic purpose' .

"... If the Spanish government had driven the fascist officers out of the armed forces, if they had dismissed the fascist officers in the police force, if they had created a workers' militia to defend the government and to enforce its decisions, there would have been no fascist military revolt and thousands of lives would have been saved (their emphasis). But the people of Spain had learned their lesson even if the British Labour leaders are too blind to see the meaning of the heroic struggle in Spain."

The blind leading the blind! Thus the Stalinists refused to pose the problems in class terms. They preferred to regard the bourgeois republican measures of the Casares Quiroga, of the Azanas and Companys as 'mistakes' rather than motivated by class interests and ideology. Thus they abandoned completely the Marxist method. Marx, Lenin and Trotsky constantly emphasised the need to abandon abstract rhetoric and to mercilessly expose the flaws in the arguments of the bourgeois democrats.

At a time when real power was in the hands of the working class the Socialist and Communist leaders preferred to hand back power to the discredited representatives of the republican bourgeoisie, while the bourgeoisie itself had gone overwhelmingly to the side of Franco—in that lay the tragedy of the Spanish revolution and the Spanish civil war.

If there was not social revolution in Spain, what is a social revolution supposed to look like? The few lawyers, doctors and MPs on the side of the Republic constituted a tiny minority—the early victories over the fascist were obtained by the workers fighting for workers' objectives.

The Communist Party in Spain was the fighting vanguard of the democratic counter revolution in republican Spain. They drew the Anarchist and the Socialist leaders behind them. The Socialist Party leadership not having a worked-out perspective, were dragged behind the Communist Party, the right wing wholeheartedly supporting and the left wing around Caballero protestingly. But the Caballero wing were not prepared to stand firm. Had they done so  
nts in Spain would have taken an entirely different course and



a socialist victory would have been possible.

The POUM was the most left organisation, parading itself as Marxist, and it followed the Anarchists in Catalonia into the government and prepared the way for their destruction. They had jumped from a party of 1,000-1,500 to 30,000 in six weeks. According to some reports this rose to 60,000 members. In proportion to population they were thus stronger than the Bolsheviks were in the early days of the Russian revolution. Moreover, the situation in Spain was far more revolutionary.

The workers' militia remained organised as a workers' army. But the CP of Spain had had its orders. On August 5th, 1936, a little more than a fortnight after the attempted counter revolution and the answering movement, it issued the following declaration:

**"The control committee of the Communist Party of Spain . . . the Spanish people, in their struggle against the rebellion, are not striving for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat BUT KNOW ONLY ONE AIM: The defence of the Republican order while respecting property.(my emphasis)**

**" . . . This work has the co-operation of such conservative parties as the Basque Nationalist Party, whose members are Catholics. This fact gives lie to the declaration made by General Franco on the 'Marxist Danger' in Spain and demonstrates the duty imposed on all order loving people, without exception, to take sides with the defenders of order, in Spain."** (my emphasis). Reported in the *Manchester Guardian* of August 6th, the traditional liberal paper in Britain.

What an inspiring and morale building appeal to the Spanish masses: they should take no action against property of the millionaire landowners and industrialists, who had prompted and financed the movement of the fascists and the insurrection of the army generals. This was even to the right of the position of the left republicans. Jose Giral, the Prime Minister in Madrid, manoeuvring under the pressure of the workers and fearful that they would seize the banks, is reported without comment in the *Daily Worker* of August 8th:

**"Explaining the measures for the control of industry and the banks Senor Giral said 'It is necessary to undermine the economic basis of fascism. Big banks and big industry have been the pay-master of fascism, supplying funds with which the fascist generals have been able to carry out a criminal attack on our people. That is why the most vigilant control is now necessary'."**

What an annihilating argument for the expropriation of the landowners, bankers and capitalists! What did the 'control' amount to? It merely preserved the basis of capitalism till better times came or the victory of Franco. It was not for this that the workers so self sacrificingly and heroically shed their blood.

Take a few random despatches from the liberal paper the *Guar-*

dian dealing with the measures taken by the Spanish workers. On the 23rd July, 1936, the *Guardian* reports from Madrid:

"A committee of syndicalist organisations today took over the control of all railway services in Madrid, dismissed the director, sub-directors, and officials of the Northern Railway Company, and replaced them by proved republicans."

Then a despatch from Barcelona on 27th August, 1936: "A government decree issued this week-end makes effective a 40 hour week and a 15% increase of wages for industrial workers earning less than 600 pesetas a month. PSUC (United Socialist and Communist Party of Catalonia) and anarchist proposals . . . a 36 hour week. 10% increases in wages below 500 pesetas a month. A 25% decrease in rents. Payment for strike days, indemnity for the unemployed. Control of production by workers. A clean-up of various army sections. The continuance of the popular militias. A summary court-martial of the military chiefs of the present insurrection."

This was—in words—accepted by the Catalan President, Companys, as he manoeuvred desperately and powerlessly for a time in the hope that the situation would improve.

In the same issue it is reported by foreigners fleeing from Barcelona: "The travellers said that the strike was the workers counter-stroke to the fascists. Next day there were no servants in the hotel and little food."

In *The Guardian* of 29th July, 1936, there is an interview with a French garage proprietor in Barcelona who had fled to Toulouse:

"No one in Barcelona obeys the government any longer, or, rather what is left of the government. Power has passed into the hands of the workers' groups, who are often guided by their political and social passions. The people obey the leaders of these various groupings, many of which are anarchist and communist. It is rather curious to find that the Mairie of Port Bou is the only one left that still functions normally under the control of the civil guard. Everywhere else local committees have been set up in other buildings and the Mairies have been abandoned. In the countryside the peasants continue to work in the fields and they are paid for poultry, cattle and other provisions in bonds. Most of these bonds are signed by the Communist Party or the United Trotskyist Workers' Party (In reality the POUM, composed of ex-Trotskyists and Catalan Nationalist former Communist Party members. EG) . . . The banks are open and they receive signed cheques but do not pay them."

And then again on August 3rd and 4th from Barcelona:

"The public services are running efficiently under the direction of syndicalists, who are now controlling all transport including the Catalan railways and certain important industries."

And again on the 4th August, 1936:

"All public services such as water, gas, electricity, tramways and railways, are now administered by the workers. The former managers and technical experts are, however, retained and consulted where necessary. But whereas the salaries of the workers have been raised by 30%, those of the technical services are strictly limited to 1,500 pesetas a month."

Sometimes the essence of an event can be discerned in trifling things, that are symptomatic of deeper processes. Thus the *Daily Worker* of August 7th, 1936, reports about the same time as the Spanish Central Committee of the Communist Party is babbling about order and the defence of democracy and property. "Towns held by Spanish government troops are having the street names changed. Names which have any connection with capitalism are being taken down. Proletariat 'liberty' and Karl Marx streets replace them."

This report from the Stalinist press itself shows the real wishes and aspiration of the armed working class at the time. They were trying to impose a revolutionary policy on the leadership which was too blind or cowardly—or in the case of the CP leadership and that of the right wing socialists too sceptical, cynical and treacherous to understand the realities of the situation. In the same issue of the *Daily Worker* their correspondent from Madrid reports:

"...The aircraft factory at Cuatro Vientos is working directly under control of a workers' committee, composed of representatives of workers of all branches... Similarly the majority of factories, railways, tramways and power plants are working under the control of factory committees... All banking operations too are under the strict control of committees composed of representatives of the clerks union, thus ensuring the impossibility of wealthy fascists putting across any operations harmful to the republican cause."

These few quotations and the material in the former pages can give only a pale reflection of the magnificence of the revolution—of the workers' revolution—let us call it by its right name; the socialist revolution, which was unfolding in Spain. The workers were trying to break with capitalism, in small things and on the question of power. The leadership of their organisations, and through them, the organisations themselves, blocked their path. There was no party, or faction in the parties, prepared to make a stand, as did the Bolsheviks in Russia, or Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht in Germany.

The Bolsheviks, from a small minority, became the majority of the Russian revolution and led the workers to victory. In Spain an exceptionally favourable situation, more favourable than in Russia before the October 1917 revolution, there was no party or leadership capable of making a correct estimate of the situation, drawing the necessary conclusions, and leading the workers firmly to take power.

All that was necessary in the situation was to explain to the workers the real relationship of forces, the necessary and vital steps and to show them how their leaders and organisations stood in the way.

Power was in the hands of the workers, but it was not centralised or organised. Committees, Juntas or Soviets, the name does not matter, should have been organised in every factory and district, elected by the workers, housewives and all sections of the working population, including the peasants and of course the workers' militias. These in turn should have been linked by delegates to form area, regional and an all national committee. This could have formed the framework of a new regime pushing aside the contemptible and powerless government and establishing the dictatorship of the proletariat.

## REVOLUTIONARIES ISOLATED

The mood and actions of the working class would have gained an overwhelming response. Outside Spain, day by day, Leon Trotsky and the Trotskyists, made the correct analysis but at that time in Spain they had neither the authority nor the organisation to influence events. The overwhelming majority of the active militants, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the POUM, and the Anarchist militants unfortunately had no access to the material issued by the Trotskyists, and thus could not react to it. That was the tragedy of the Spanish revolution, which doomed it to defeat and prepared the way for the victory of Franco in the civil war.

The events of the civil war can only be given in a sketchy form and even a synopsis here. If necessary we will return to this theme with the necessary documentation. However Felix Morrow has written a Marxist classic *Revolution and Counter Revolution in Spain* dealing with the first 18 months which is an invaluable record of the facts. We hope that it will become available in Spanish for the benefit of the YS and Socialist Party comrades.

Jose Giral, as Prime Minister of a cabinet composed exclusively of Left Republicans, became more and more incompatible with the real relationship of forces. Consequently Giral resigned on September 14th and handed over to Caballero, who formed a government consisting of Socialists—left and right, Communists, Left Republicans and even right republicans. Thus instead of dismantling the bourgeois state, Caballero and the left socialists collaborated with the Stalinists in shoring it up with the 'correct' parliamentary forms.

They represented neither the decisive sections of the bourgeoisie nor even a sizeable section of the proletariat. They hung in limbo, without even the 'normal' basis of a bourgeois state—control of the armed forces. The workers' militias were under the control of the workers' organisations and looked to them for guidance and

leadership.

Instead of encouraging the workers in their endeavours to take control, Caballero promised a better world . . . After the war! In the Cortes he announced: "It is important to state at once that the structure of the country will be changed after our victory and that the first article of the constitution according to which Spain is a republic of the toiling masses can at last be realised . . ." (page 1,260, *International Press Correspondence*, 19 September, 1936).

But the whole essence of a civil war is that the masses cannot wait! A change in the social structure has to be carried out immediately if it is to have an effect on the workers, and especially the peasants. They have been deceived so many times, that they become sceptical and indifferent to promises. Statements of social changes especially when couched in such vague, indefinite phrases can have no appeal, especially to peasants.

They want deeds not words in a situation where words are punctuated by bullets. Lenin explained long ago that "An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory", especially where promises are concerned. If the masses are to make great sacrifices of blood and suffering it must be for a worthwhile aim—and not that of the discredited bourgeois republic which has prepared the way for the fascist counter revolution.

Gilding the 'republic' as was done by Caballero can carry no conviction to the peasants. They think in terms of the land. That is the reality to them. When propaganda by loudspeakers to the rebel army was conducted in the trenches, the reply of the conscripted peasants in Franco's army to appeals to come over to the republic was 'what has the republic done for us?' To them it was a struggle between generals. They didn't want to fight but they could see no fundamental differences between the two sides. Why risk reprisals to their families and risk their own lives by coming over? Consequently they fought for their own enslavement as well as that of the workers and peasants of all Spain.

Just to make sure that there were to be no real social changes the General Secretary of the 'Communist' Party, Jose Diaz wrote in the same issue: "In order to alarm international opinion (whose opinion, that of the capitalists?—EG) its enemies have asserted that it is a socialist-communist government. In reality it is nothing more nor less than the continuation of the republican and democratic ministries." This is for once correct, and we have seen the record of these ministries! "Where the peasants *en masse* have taken up the armed struggle against the rebels and are now organising a guerilla struggle at the rear of the reactionary bandits . . ."

Hunting for examples of that mythical creature under modern conditions the 'revolutionary bourgeoisie' the Communist Party writer

continues: "The considerable success of the party of Martinez Barrio at the elections (of February, 1936) cannot be explained otherwise than by the anti-fascist sentiments of part of the bourgeoisie" (after the July fascist insurrection!). "Jose Giral, Francisco Barnes, Casares Quiroga (his role is sufficiently dealt with in his threats to give instructions to shoot anyone arming the workers), Enrico Kames and Manuel Blasque Garon—industrialists and landowners who form part of the ministry of Jose Giral." In fact they represented not their class but themselves as individuals—within the republican camp desperately manoueuering against the socialist revolution.

Apart from the fact that in the early days and hours of the fascist uprising, before they had lost control of events, the liberal government tried to compromise with the Franco gangsters. The article continues with grisly and unconcious humour: "Had the developments of events been different it is possible that some of these people would have sought for a compromise with reaction . . .

"There can be no doubt that the overwhelming majority of the bourgeoisie sympathise with the insurgents, and support them, but there are groups of the bourgeoisie, especially among the national minorities, therefore these groups must not be left out of account in the anti-fascist camp. A wide social basis at a moment of such sharp struggle is one of the factors guaranteeing the success of the revolution, the Spanish anti-fascist people's front, as a specific form of the unification of various classes in face of the fascist danger (my emphasis) . . . At the same time the peculiarity of the Spanish people's front, the relatively slow pace at which the masses of the peasantry are being drawn into the armed struggle . . ."

To add fire to petrol hardly increases ones forces. To have the support of the remnant of the bourgeoisie was, as events were to demonstrate, to weaken and undermine, not strengthen the struggle against Franco. Action expropriating the landowners and capitalists would have strengthened the workers camp a million times more. But in reality the Stalinists, at the instructions of Moscow, were desperately trying to restore the bourgeois republican regime. In Catalonia, and Spain, as the party that stood for 'law', 'order', 'the defence of property' they became the party of the middle class in the towns and the rich peasants in the countryside. At that time two thirds of the membership were composed of shopkeepers, foremen, small businessmen, rich peasants, top levels of technicians, etc. Only one third was composed of workers—mostly the most backward section of the working class.

### **WORKERS' OR CAPITALIST ARMY?**

The Stalinists as defenders of the 'revolutionary bourgeoisie' were trying to restore the situation in republican Spain as it existed before

the revolution. This required counter revolution—bloody and vile—within the republican camp.

As early as October 1936 they prevailed on Caballero to begin the process of transforming the militia into a 'regular army'. Now it is clear that in a civil war centralised command is necessary. But the whole point of an army in modern society is in whose interests is it organised, what class basis it possesses, what is its motivation, which class does the general staff and the officers come from, whose interests do they represent, what class basis does the army fulfil? No mythical appeals to anti-fascist unity can avoid the class issues while class society remains.

Trotsky and the Bolsheviks built an army also from scratch. But it was the army of the workers in power. They used tens of thousands of the officers of the Tsarist army, but they were under the strict control of workers' commissars loyal to the workers' state and to the ideals of the socialist revolution.

If a centralised army is to be built it can only be the tool of a workers' or capitalist state—it cannot be a non-class army—a mythical class neutrality is impossible. Consequently, afraid or incapable of consummating the socialist revolution, Caballero and the other leaders assisted in carrying through the organisation of a capitalist army. This again was to have disastrous consequences for the civil war.

As already shown the overwhelming majority of the officers and generals went over to the fascists, far more apparently than even in Russia. In a purely military struggle they would clearly have the advantage. But war, and even to a magnified extent civil war is the continuation of politics by forcible means. In war, says Napoleon, the moral is to the physical as four is to one.

By creating an army not on the model of the Red Army of 1918-20 but of a capitalist army, the whole basis of the workers' struggle was undermined. Systematically in Barcelona and Madrid the Stalinists toiled to recreate the bourgeois state. The first great successes had all been achieved by the methods of social revolution. The militias in the first rush conquered Aragon. The land was seized in Catalonia and Aragon. Advancing further than the Russian revolution in its early days in response to generations of anarchist propaganda the land was collectivised by the peasants themselves. The militia stood at the gates of Huesca, Teruel and Saragossa.

But the central government starved this front of arms and supplies for fear of the social revolutionary consequences that victory on this front would mean. Caballero allowed himself to be blackmailed by the CP under threat that the Russians would cease to supply arms, the bulk of which were being sent to the Madrid front, where the CP played an important role.



It was the growing conflict between the aspirations of the workers and the gradual return to bourgeois 'normality' which precipitated the crisis which came to be known as the "May days of 1937".

Every revolution has seen similar movements of the workers when they felt the revolution being betrayed. The June days of France in Paris in 1848, the July days in Russia of 1917 and the January days in Germany in 1919. The masses feel power slipping out of their hands. They rise convulsively in protest against the 'sell out' to the bourgeoisie in an elemental movement.

The immediate cause of the uprising of the working class in Barcelona and Catalonia was the attempt of the Stalinists to seize control of the telephone exchange for the Catalan government. This had been under the control of the workers in the CNT since the first days of the revolution, and represented an element of workers' control.

The Stalinists in the Generalitat, the autonomous Catalanian government, sent some tanks and troops to seize control of the exchange. The workers replied with a general strike. Barricades appeared in Barcelona and other Catalanian towns. The government was powerless. An attempt to send assault guards from Valencia and to send the International Brigade to put down the movement of the workers collapsed because of the refusal of the troops to be moved to take action against the workers.

Once again, power was in the hands of the workers! There were no troops in Barcelona or elsewhere on which the government could rely to put down the movement.

Here the CNT and the POUM came to the rescue of the revived bourgeois state. Arguing that it was impossible to start a civil war within a civil war these 'Marxists' appealed to the workers to return to work. Some way of ending the conflict would be found by agreement between the workers and the government. For four days the workers controlled the streets. Had the POUM issued the call to take power there was no force to stop them! The anarchists and the POUM prevailed on the workers to "go back to work". The crisis was over! The opportunity to transform the situation was lost.

Had the POUM taken power they could have offered a united front against Franco to the government in Madrid. The government had no troops on which it could rely. Very rapidly the masses in Madrid, Valencia and at the fronts would have rallied to the banner of socialism in Barcelona. The power of the Madrid government would have crumbled and disappeared.

The POUM failed to act. They had entered the Catalanian bourgeois government with the Anarchists and hoped for miracles. In words they were against class collaboration, in deeds they collaborated with the shadow of the capitalist class.



Within six weeks they received the reward for their cowardice and lack of perspective. In a revolution the masses learn fast, but these 'leaders' had learnt nothing. The Stalinists seized the opportunity provided by the fact that the masses had been reduced to passivity and despair. Using the pretext that the POUM were involved in a plot with Franco they were declared illegal. Nin and other leaders were murdered by GPU agents in Spain. The Party disappeared from the scene.

Caballero had refused to agree to the suppression of the POUM. Consequently he had to be removed. The CP hatched a plot with Prieto and the right wing socialists and with the bourgeois republicans in the cabinet. Caballero was replaced by Negrin, who was more pliant in the hands of the Stalinists. "La Pasionaria" hailed this as the 'government of victory'! There were some military victories. Very few! But by transforming the struggle into a purely military one the seeds for defeat had been sown. The bourgeois officers who had military training were not reliable.

After the dissolution of the militias, Malaga and the Basque country were betrayed by a section of the staff into the hands of the fascists.

But in any event, as a purely military struggle the war could not be won! The general excuses, if they deal with the subject at all, to explain the defeat by the reformists and Stalinists, is foreign intervention and the Moors. Hitler and Mussolini supplied troops, 100,000 Italians and 20,000 to 60,000 Germans, tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of Moors were in Franco's army.

But in the Russian revolution, too, there was intervention from foreign troops. Twenty-one armies, of all the great powers, intervened. Russia was blockaded. In the early stages of the civil war only one province with Petrograd and Moscow remained in the hands of the Bolsheviks. The rest of Russia was in the hands of the White Guard and the armies of intervention.

The Bolsheviks won not because of superior military arms, or skills but because they waged the civil war as a social struggle. Land to the peasants, freedom for the oppressed nationalities, factories to the workers and proletarian internationalism was the method of the Bolsheviks. Consequently every Russian army sent against the Bolsheviks and Russian workers and peasantry, and their power, mutinied and had to be withdrawn. Behind the capitalist and imperialist lines the peasants and workers sabotaged the struggle. They supplied the Red Army with invaluable information about their enemies. They organised guerilla war. The White Guard armies, feeling the hostility of the people, became demoralised. Tens of thousands conscripted, deserted to the Reds. The Russian workers were victorious in the civil war.

In China Mao Tse-Tung and the Chinese CP, waging a semi-revolutionary war, gained victory. The Civil War started with an overwhelming majority of Chiang Kai-Shek forces, militarily and numerically. They were supplied with the most modern equipment in tanks, planes and guns, by American imperialism. The greater part of China was in their hands. But giving the land to the peasants, reserving a piece of land to the soldiers of Chiang's armies, in the villages from where they came, won over the troops. By hundreds of thousands, and by whole divisions, they deserted to the Red Army. Waging a social war—a semi-revolutionary war—resulted in military victories too, because of the high morale of the troops, from the peasant officers to the smallest corporal and private, that is the way—though lacking sophisticated material—which was brought over by the soldiers deserting to their side—though the military odds seemed to be overwhelmingly against them in territory, numbers and material, they were victorious.

When the Spanish civil war is examined the opposite process is to be seen. The magnificent initiative of the workers, gains dazzling victories of an unarmed working class in two-thirds of Spain. The fleet comes over to the side of the workers as do part of the Air Force and Artillery.

But the revolution is not consummated. Inch by inch the workers are blasted back. The democratic counter-revolution in the rear undermined the struggle at the front. The land in Catalonia and Aragon is repossessed by the landlords. The factories are gradually regained by the capitalists. The bourgeois state and bourgeois army are restored. Power is in the hands of 'democratic capitalism'.

What are the consequences? The Moors were Franco's crack troops. Why did they fight for enslavement for themselves and their Spanish brothers, the workers and peasants? Abd-el-Krim, who led the struggle for Moorish independence from Spain and France, was in exile on an island in the Mediterranean. He offered the republican government to come to Spain and appeal to the Moors to come over to the side of the republic. All he asked in return was autonomy for Morocco. But to give autonomy for Morocco would offend the 'democracies' of Britain and France by undermining their empires in Africa. Moreover, was not the Popular Front government pledged to maintain all the Spanish land? Not waging the war by revolutionary means, the offer was rejected. Throughout the conflict the Moors remained the fiercest and best troops. The crowning irony of this particular fact is that later, fearful of the collapse of his regime were he to wage a colonial war, Franco conceded—not autonomy—but independence! Thus the fascists gave at the first risk what the miserable Popular Front government was not prepared to concede when it was fighting for its life!

It is true that Mussolini and Hitler supplied enormous quantities of material and also troops to Franco. But those troops were Italian peasants and workers, German peasants and workers. They could be reached—they could only be reached by an international socialist appeal as with the Bolsheviks in Russia. But in spite of all, foreign troops and Moors were auxiliaries. The main body of Franco's troops were Spaniards, mainly peasants conscripted into Franco's army. They could only be won over by showing the fundamental social differences between the armies. Land to the peasants, factories to the workers, freedom for the oppressed nationalities in Spain and in Africa—that was the only programme for victory. The programme of transferring the power back to the landlords and capitalists could have no effect on the troops in Franco's army. Militarily superior in officers, tanks, on this level all the advantages were on the side of Franco. Waging the struggle as a 'military war'—not a social war waged by arms—guaranteed defeat. 'Popular Front' France and 'democratic' Britain starved republican Spain of arms with the hypocritical farce of 'non-intervention'. Stalinist Russia participated in this farce. Only after precious months had been lost did they supply arms, and then only on condition of halting the social revolution.

The policies of the workers' parties in the revolution and civil war guaranteed defeat. But let us assume for a moment that by some fantastic miracle military if not social victory could have been obtained. What then? Power had been handed back to the capitalists and landlords. The remnants of the old officer caste and middle class had taken over the officers' jobs in the reconstructed bourgeois army. The country was ruined and had been laid waste in the terrible civil war.

The repression of the initiative of the workers and their nascent control of the factories had demoralised and thwarted the ideals of the working class. The generals, placed in full command of the renewed army, decided everything. Towards the end of the struggle it was apparent that victory was far away.

The uncontrolled army command, of the refurbished regular army, seized power to try and propose a compromise with Franco! General Casado and General Miaja—Miaja with a Communist Party membership card in his pocket—established a military dictatorship! As a reward for being the fighting vanguard of democratic counter-revolution, the 'Communist' Party was made illegal and forced underground. There were now two dictatorships in Spain—on both sides of the trenches!

Even had 'republican' Spain won the civil war there would have been a military police state in Spain! This was the final condemnation of the policies of all the workers' organisations.

Spain, after more than three decades of dictatorship, is moving

once again towards revolution. the CP leaders, having learned nothing, play the same perfidious role.

It is the task of the Spanish Young Socialists to carry the lessons of the civil war to the working class, and of course to the rank and file fighters of the Communist Party. Internationally and nationally the perspective is favourable. Anarchism is discredited in its former 'last Latin hide-out' and is very weak. The Socialist Party and the Communist Party are the two real forces within the working class. The CP rank and file will respond to a bold lead from the SP and the YS if it is based on the ideas of Marxism.

Victory of the socialist revolution in Spain can transform the international situation. The only road for the Spanish workers to ensure the success of the revolution is to learn the lessons of the Spanish revolution of 1931-37 and of the civil war. Without this understanding they would be doomed to make similar mistakes and suffer the fate of their fathers and grandfathers.

**Ted Grant**  
**Autumn 1973**

## Notes:

<b>Asturian Commune</b>	Uprising of workers in 1934, drowned in blood, with over 5,000 murdered in reprisals.
<b>Comintern</b>	The Communist International. The body linking together CPs internationally. By the 1930's it had been reduced to the role of border guard for Stalin's regime in Russia
<b>GPU</b>	Stalinist secret police
<b>Cortes</b>	Spanish parliament
<b>Caciques</b>	Landlords who acted like féudal barons.
<b>Paris Commune</b>	First workers' government, held power from 18 March 1871 to 28 May 1871 before it was bloodily put down.
<b>Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries</b>	Reformist parties in Russia during the revolution
<b>Coup d'etat of Sanjurjo</b>	An uprising of officers against the republic in 1932

## Glosary of political organisations:

<b>PSOE</b>	Socialist Party (also refered to as SP and SSP).
<b>CP</b>	Communist Party.
<b>PSUC</b>	Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia. In reality the CP in Catalonia.
<b>JSU</b>	Unified Socialist Youth. Formed as a result of fusion between SP and CP youth in 1935.
<b>UGT</b>	The second biggest trade union federation led by the Socialist Party.
<b>CNT</b>	Anarcho-Syndicalist trade union federation. Led by the FAI which was in effect an anarchist party.
<b>POUM</b>	Workers' Party of Marxist Unification formed in 1935 by a fusion between former supporters of Trotsky (Nin, Andrade) and Catalan Nationalist ex-CP members (Maurin).

<b>Republicans</b>	A general term for parties supporting the Popular Front government. Several bourgeois parties had the word "republican" in their name.
<b>Radicals</b>	A bourgeois party, initially standing left of centre, ended up in the camp of reaction.
<b>CEDA</b>	Extreme right wing Catholic party.
<b>Falange</b>	The Fascist Party
<b>Esquerra</b>	Catalan Left, a bourgeois nationalist party.

#### Glosary of names of individuals:

<b>Trotsky</b>	Together with Lenin, leader of the Russian revolution.
<b>Caballéro</b>	Leader of the left wing of the Socialist Party.
<b>Prieto</b>	Leader of the right wing of the Socialist Party.
<b>Nin, Andrade</b>	Leaders of POUM.
<b>Ibarruri</b>	"La Pasionaria"—the most famous CP leader.
<b>Durrutti</b>	Leader of the left wing of the FAI (Anarchist Party).
<b>Negrin</b>	Socialist Party prime minister after Caballero.
<b>Company's</b>	Member of the Esquerra, became leader of the Catalan regional government (the Generalitat) in 1934.
<b>Azana, Zamora, Giral, Quiroga, Barrio</b>	Bourgeois republican leaders. Held various posts between 1931 and 1936.
<b>Franco, Mola</b>	Generals, leaders of the Fascist uprising in July 1936.
<b>Lerroux</b>	Leader of the Radical Party.
<b>Gil Robles</b>	Leader of the CEDA.
<b>Primo de Rivera</b>	Military dictator, 1923-1930.
<b>Alfonso</b>	King of Spain, abdicated in 1931.
<b>Chiang Kai-Shek</b>	Military dictator in China from 1920 to 1944.

## **Further reading on the Spanish revolution**

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